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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

SEARCH(ING) (FOR) VOICE(S)

BY

CARLETON DEREK LEGGO

A THESIS
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Carl Leggo
(Student's signature)

27 Lomond St.
Corner Brook, Newfoundland
A2H 3B1
(Student's permanent address)

Date: June 27, 1989

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled "Search(ing) (for) Voice(s)" submitted by Carleton Derek Leggo in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

J Parsons
Dr. J. Parsons, Supervisor

M. Iveson
Dr. M. Iveson

J. Jagodzinski
Dr. J. Jagodzinski

D. Dillon
Dr. D. Dillon

M Chorny
Dr. M. Chorny

Date: June 27, 1989

DEDICATION

Written in an ongoing experience
of love
I dedicate my words
in love

to four women

my mother, Kerry, rich with words of hope and humour, who encourages me to write the stories of Lynch's Lane by reading my poems to family and neighbours

my mother-in-law, Vivian, whose homemade bread and squashberry jelly, made with affection, fill both my stomach and my imagination with poetry

my daughter, Anna, fantasy writer and newspaper editor, whose words are fired with fervour in a journey after justice, creative in ways beyond counting

my wife, Lana, my one true, good, and generous friend, who during more than seven years of marriage to a student has never once complained that I should graduate and get a job, who supports and spurs and serves and soothes and saves, whose love knows no end

and four men

my father, Russell, who early fostered my desire for words, built many bookcases to store the words, and in the strange way of fathers and sons continues to inspire in me many words

my father-in-law, Chesley, who chooses his words as carefully as he chooses his woods, a craftsman in wood, a model for a craftsman in words

my son, Aaron, who at seven is infatuated with words, a reader and writer and illustrator, a maker of books, a model for his father

my Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, who is the Word without beginning or end

ABSTRACT

In "Search(ing) (for) Voice(s)" I examine the concept and function of voice in writing. Readers commonly claim that they hear the voice of an author or narrator in texts. Beginning writers are often advised: Write in your own honest, authentic, sincere voice. Informed by the theoretical perspectives of reader response, deconstruction, feminism, and Marxism, I interrogate the concept of voice in writing. I contend that voice (the experience, rhetorical device, personality, tone, politics, intertextuality, authenticity, origin, ubiquity, energy of voice) cannot be schematized and classified anymore than beachstones can be categorized and labelled.

My dissertation is a written product born of a writing process. Its conclusions are inconclusive because the process has not ceased, only been abandoned temporarily. I have inserted my pen into the unending flow of textuality (much like inserting my finger into a stream), and however insignificant the insertion, I still accomplish an assertion, hold up a sign (or system of signs) replete with significance, a product produced in a process of writing which readily acknowledges and promotes the writer's ongoing struggle with language as writing is constructed and shaped and

revised. And since every reader is a co-producer of the dissertation, every reader continues to write the dissertation, to insert more fingers into the constructing and shaping and producing process.

The dissertation not only explores voice in writing, but also performs in a chorus of voices. It is motivated by a desire to participate in an unfolding modern aesthetic which challenges the hierarchy between traditional scholarly discourse and creative discourse. Therefore, "Search(ing) (for) Voice(s)" juxtaposes varied kinds of writing: quotations, journal excerpts, long lists of questions, literature review, passages of reflection on experience, and poetry. In effect I convene a chorus of voices, a symphony of voices, a cacophony of voices, in order to understand with more rigour and vigour the concept and function of voice in writing. The reader is invited to join me in "Search(ing) (for) Voice(s)."

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INVITATION

Confession

In my dissertation I court contradiction and confusion and consternation in my commitment to shake up and explode the notion of voice in writing, in my claim that voice (the experience of voice, the device of voice, the personality of voice, the tone of voice, the politics of voice, the intertextuality of voice, the authenticity of voice, the origin of voice, the ubiquity of voice, the energy of voice) cannot be conceptualized, schematized, and classified anymore than beachstones can be categorized and labelled, in my contention that idiosyncrasy and unpredictability and meaning-making characterize the writing experience, in my conviction that writing teachers must not reduce writing to lists of concepts and skills that can be taught to all students in ways that can be evaluated for purposes of report cards and promotion, in my devotion to interrogation and self-conscious rhetorical posturing and playful earnestness and contravening conventions, in my resolve to understand writing as the manipulation of language (material signifiers) in order to produce effects (emotional and ideational) in readers, in my dedication to constructing a picture of reality that incorporates insights into chaos, the abyss, the flux, in my experience of writing as magnificently magical mystery, in my determination that circuitous, laboured writing full of obscurity and obfuscation (writing that twists, serpentine-like across the page and down the page, coiling back on itself, springing in a sudden frenzy of attack or slithering with calculated slowness) can manifest an energetic power by providing a site where the reader can dwell and play and dance in the production of multiple and complex meanings, in my perception that writing is not a steady, step-by-step progression through identifiable stages like moving a ship through the St. Lawrence Seaway, in my experience of the often uncontrollable aliveness of language, especially the relentless compulsion to write, to listen to writing, to respond to writing with more writing, in my conception of writing as chaotic and risky and emotionally and physically demanding, of writing as exploration and struggling with words and discovery and growth.

Romance

As a writer I enter my voice into a chorus of voices. I am caught up in the codes and conventions and intertextual connections of the discourse communities in which I operate. I often have the desire to overstep these boundaries, to exert pressure against the walls that inscribe the possibilities of meaning-making in writing. But at the same time I am divided by the equally strong desire to goose-step obediently around the parade ground, happy to know at least a modicum of acceptance.

I am born into language, into its rule-governed structures and codes. When I write or read, I am both empowered and constrained by my inevitable involvement in these codes. For example, as a child I knew the structures of story-telling from hearing and reading and writing and telling stories. Therefore, I revelled in the pleasure of story-making. Nevertheless, my knowledge of the codes was also constraining because I seldom had the confidence to push against the codes, to test their plasticity. In other words I learned to obey the codes, but failed to interpret them, to translate them in their plurality. No longer a child I am learning what Roland Barthes understands:

> Writing is that play by which I turn around as well as I can in a narrow place: I am wedged in, I struggle between the hysteria necessary to write and the image-repertoire, which oversees, controls, purifies, banalizes, codifies, corrects, imposes the

> focus (and the vision) of a social communication. On the one hand I want to be desired and on the other not to be desired: hysterical and obsessional at one and the same time. (Sontag 419)

My dissertation supervisor told me, "Do what you want to do; write the dissertation you want to write." And I realized that the dissertation I want to write probably can't be written because, even with encouragement, I lack the courage to write with boldness and innovation, and writing with boldness and innovation is precisely the kind of writing I admire and aspire to because I am inspired by Ronald Sukenick's sound advice:

> One of the main purposes of really good writing is to destroy other really good writing, to destroy all the old concepts and formulas that come out of the best of the past. You should destroy them lovingly and with great consciousness and awareness of them, but always with the end in mind of getting beyond them again. (282)

But I am not a brave writer. I began to write a dissertation proposal. And I began to consider my audience for both the proposal and the final dissertation. I wrote in my journal:

As I consider the audience for this dissertation I can name five of the six readers I am writing for. I have information about each one--scholarly and professional interests, personalities, accomplishments. But do I know my readers? Only a little. Certainly I cannot predict with precision their reactions to my writing. I cannot predict if they will react to my ideas with affirmation or negation, jubilation or consternation.

Still, there is an important sense in which my audience is known. Because a dissertation is one of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy and, consequently, is connected to the institutional context of a university, there are certain expectations, conventions, and procedures that are understood (legislated, produced by tradition) to constrain the production of a dissertation. Therefore, as I operate within a particular context, I am addressing an audience that is not so much a group of individuals as a collective representation of an institution's

> requirements. Guided (or bound) by those requirements, I will not likely write the dissertation as a collection of stories for children, a narrative sequence of poems, a five-act drama, a scathing, curmudgeonly collection of editorials (though there might be much value in extending the conception of a dissertation to include those approaches). The real danger perhaps is that I will write the dissertation with a sense of too much constraint, with a sense that the audience demands strict adherence to a commonly accepted set of conventions, and fail to stretch those conventions. The cynical adage, "With experience you learn what sells," is too often spoken by students. Needed are more students like my grade nine classmate Brian who, when asked to write a book report, chose Dr. Seuss' Green Eggs and Ham and combed a dictionary for long words. His report was a polysyllabic reading of a monosyllabic book. (Unfortunately the teacher failed Brian.)

I wrote a dissertation proposal. Essentially I proposed to go to the art gallery and imitate the masters. Eventually my painting might even look like theirs though it would never be more than mimicry, parody, pastiche, imitation. The masters contravene and reconstitute tradition, ways of doing things, ways of seeing. But I had decided I could be an imitator. It is risky to stand on a street corner and sing of your own experience in your own voice while millions of Sony Walkmans fill heads with the top forty hits which all sound like one song, a perpetual, unchanging song. I had decided I could sing the top forty hits. I could sound like *everyperson*.

Significantly I was motivated by the realization that my supervisory committee has the authority, the keys to the gate, a signature of inclusion or exclusion, the power of an institution/club/tribe. The committee is the puppetteer and I am a marionette whose only voice is borrowed and projected.

And there is Pinnochio to remind me of the evil and the folly and the disaster that lurks around every corner for the marionette who chooses to disobey authority.

Yet in the end Pinnochio enters into fullness of life, becomes a "real boy," the consequence of his risk-taking, his failure, his growth in experience.

In my candidacy examination I was asked, "Do you want to write a dissertation based on this proposal?" I replied: "No. Not really."

Like a mountain that must be traversed in order to enter the more lush country on the other side, I intended to write a dissertation that I didn't really want to write, that didn't seem especially significant, that was full of complaint and criticism, that croaked in somebody's notion of a scholarly, academic voice, that huffed and puffed with braggadocio, whimpered and whined with sibilant sycophancy, and pontificated with proclamations for progress--a sort of bash 'em, trash 'em, hash 'em, flash 'em writing.

My supervisory committee understood and authorized me to author a dissertation in my authorial voice(s), in my voice(s) of authority, to write the dissertation I want (even desire) to write. Unlike the Wizard of Oz who only needed to remind the lion that he had, in fact, already proven his courage, my supervisory committee recognized my timidity and empowered me to embark on my own journey along the Yellow Brick Road in order to prove my courage.

Writing as Process

My dissertation is a written product born of a writing process. Its conclusions are inconclusive because the process has not ceased, only been abandoned temporarily. I have inserted my pen into the unending flow of textuality (much like inserting my finger into a stream), and however insignificant the insertion, I still accomplish an assertion, hold up a sign (or system of signs) replete with significance, a product produced in a process of writing which readily acknowledges and promotes the writer's ongoing struggle with language as the writer shapes and revises and constructs her writing.

In "Writing as Process: How Writing Finds Its Own Meaning" Donald M. Murray notes:

> At the beginning of the composing process there is only blank paper. At the end of the composing process there is a piece of writing which has detached itself from the writer and found its own meaning, a meaning the writer probably did not intend. (3)

Murray is concerned with the writer's "process of discovering meaning" (6). He describes the writing process as "a kinetic activity, a matter of instantaneous motion, action and reaction which is never still" (12). He notes that "the calm, logical moment when the words stand at dress parade and present a meaning gives no hint of the battles which produce that moment" (12). (Any dress parade my words join will be a motley affair with words wearing the scars and wounds of battles, past and present, for all readers to view.) The writer does not begin with a mentally constructed text that needs to be transcribed. The writer engages in an ongoing dialogue with her written words. Out of that dialogue meaning is produced and constructed and revealed. Murray is concerned that "a student might get the dangerous misconception that writers know the form before they know the content, that students know what they have to say before they say it" (13). He confesses, "I would not write--would not need to write--if I knew what I was going to say before I said it" (13). Near the end of the essay Murray acknowledges that "this piece of writing revolted against my intent and taught me what I did not know" (19).

In summary, the process writing paradigm emphasizes writing as a process, not writing as a product. The chaotic nature of the writing process is acknowledged. Writers do not begin with a clear understanding of what they will write. Instead they discover meaning during the process of writing. The paradigm stresses the significance of writing as a meaning-making venture.

Writing as (Co)product(ion)

Even the dissertation which is the product of a process, curtailed and abandoned for practical reasons of time and family commitments and bureaucratic demands and the necessity to find a job, is not a product in the sense that it concretely represents distilled experience and reflected wisdom and essential truth. Every reader is, in fact, a co-producer, a co-writer of the dissertation. Hence, the dissertation is a product only in the sense that it comprises sheets of paper with alphabetic symbols. Every reader continues to write the dissertation, to insert more fingers into the shaping and constructing and producing process.

In the reading activity the reader is engaged in making meaning, in actualizing a narrative, in questioning, in imagining, in visualizing, in hearing. The reader is writing the text as she reads. As Louise Rosenblatt explains:

> The reading of a text is an event occurring at a particular time in a particular environment at a particular moment in the life history of the reader. The transaction will involve not only the past experience but also the present state and present interests or preoccupations of the reader. (20)

For Rosenblatt the "text" is only a "set or series of signs interpretable as linguistic symbols." The "poem" (which term Rosenblatt uses to refer to the work which is produced in the transaction), on the other hand, is "the experience shaped by the reader under the guidance of the text" (12). In other words, the poem is produced through the transaction between the reader and the text. I especially like Rosenblatt's suggestion that the reader is a performer impressing her own individuality upon a unique production (or evocation) of the poem (28).

Reconceptualizing the reading/writing connection advocates the productive powers of the reader--her interaction with the text, her playing with the text (as well as playing the text like a musical score), her entering the text from her personal, cultural, political, and historical experience, her traversing the text like a skater on ice drawing configurations and combinations and contours.

So readers are acknowledged as co-producers of this dissertation. As Barry Cameron explains:

> The reader, playing with the writer, is positioned as the subject of the enunciation (the participant of the speech event, the speaking subject, the producer of meaning) producing the enounced (the narrated event, what is uttered, what is stated). (9)

To conceive of the reader as a co-writer is to place big demands on the reader. Though I share Barthes' concern that the reader's role has been devalued while the author's role has been aggrandized (Rustle 30), I am not sure that readers have not willingly acquiesced in their inferior status as functionaries through which authors' stories and ideas have been transmitted. Perhaps such a role for readers has been adopted because it is a less demanding role. The hard work is done by the author. Andrew Ross notes a changing perspective in much recent writing:

> The sense that a fair deal has been struck; the labor of composition is somehow equal to the labor of reading, and so the readers share meaning rather than merely responding to the writer's meaning, or else producing their own at will. The result is somewhere between the ease of consumption and the headache of comprehension. (376)

Reading my dissertation might be hard work, but I am encouraged by Don DeLillo's comment that "making things difficult for the reader is less an attack on the reader than it is on the age and its facile knowledge-market" (87). Moreover, I agree with William Gass: "A lot of modern writers . . . are writing for the fast mind that speeds over the text like those noisy bastards in motorboats" (161). It seems to me that if anything is worth reading, it is worth reading slowly.

Writing as Performance

Because my dissertation is a product produced in a process and a (co)product(ion) in process, it is also a performance. As Jacques Derrida proposes, "no matter what I say, before all else I am seeking to produce effects" (Card 113). And as the Dodo observes in Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, "the best way to explain it is to do it" (Carroll 32).

My purpose is to explore and discuss and interrogate the concept and function of voice in writing. I could have written a dissertation that reviewed the literature concerning voice, examined the subject informed by post-structuralist theoretical perspectives, and proposed a helpful list of pedagogical implications for teachers, a dissertation that posited and promulgated and "proved" a thesis, a dissertation that rang with echoes of conventional scholarly voices pretending authority and transparency and immutability. Instead I have written a dissertation that, not only explores and discusses and interrogates the concept and function of voice in writing, but also performs in a chorus of voices. As Barbara Johnson proposes, "one finds the performative . . . whenever, in a given situation, saying something is doing something recognizable" (Difference 55). She also suggests that the performative is "less about something than about being about" (63).

One influential model for my dissertation is the essay "For the Etruscans" in which Rachel Blau Duplessis juxtaposes varied kinds of writing: quotations, journal excerpts, letters, and passages of formal analysis. Elaine Showalter comments: "Duplessis tries to represent and re-create the texture of the modern female aesthetic she is attempting to define: fluid, nonlinear, decentralized, nonhierarchic, and many-voiced" (15). While I am not convinced that this kind of reconceptualized writing is necessarily allied to a feminine aesthetic alone, it does involve a challenge to convention, an interrogation of seemingly natural ways of writing, an unmasking of the ways in which writing is formulated and controlled and evaluated according to discursive formations determined more by the acquisition and maintenance of power in a few hands than by considerations of empowering writers. My dissertation is motivated by a desire to participate in an unfolding modern aesthetic which Gregory Ulmer has announced entails "the collapse of the distinction (opposition or hierarchy) between critical-theoretical reflection and creative practice" (225).

Advice

Derrida explains writing as grafting on a host text: "It is necessary to read and reread those in whose wake I write, the 'books' in whose margins and between whose lines I mark out and read a text simultaneously almost identical and entirely other" (Positions 4). Like Derrida my dissertation involves grafting on host texts, but I also regard myself as a host in my dissertation, a host who invites and convenes and caters a party. My voice(s) can be heard here and there, but many voices can be heard, a symphony of voices, a cacophony of voices, a din of voices, a den of voices, a veritable Rowan and Martin's Laugh-In.

So you are cordially invited to help write the following dissertation, to interact with the record of my "Search(ing) (for) Voice(s)." But as Gertrude Stein explained in 1946 there are dangers inherent in any effort to reconceptualize writing:

> Those who are creating the modern composition authentically are naturally only of importance when they are dead because by that time the modern composition having become

> past is classified and the description of it is classical. That is the reason why the creator of the new composition in the arts is an outlaw until he is a classic, there is hardly a moment in between and it is really too bad very much too bad naturally for the creator but also very much too bad for the enjoyer, they all really would enjoy the created so much better just after it has been made than when it is already a classic, but it is perfectly simple that there is no reason why the contemporaries should see, because it would not make any difference as they lead their lives in the new composition anyway, and as everyone is naturally indolent why naturally they don't see. (454)

Because the journey of this dissertation frequently traverses territory unknown, yet known, known, yet unknown, the following observation by Maurice Blanchot is provided as a talisman, a touchstone, a scripture to be worn in a phylactery around the neck, wise words that help to defamiliarize the familiar and familiarize the unfamiliar:

> Only the nonliterary book is presented as a tightly woven net of determined

> significations, a set of real affirmations. Before being read by anyone, the nonliterary book has already been read by all, and it is this prior reading that guarantees it a solid existence. But the book which has its origin in art has no guarantee in the world, and when it is read, it has never been read before. It does not come into its presence as a work except in the space opened by this unique reading, each time the first and each time the only. (Space 194)

IS THERE A VOICE IN THIS TEXT?

calling forever echoes of labyrinth the
in lost am I voice(s) (for) search(ing)

forever calling search(ing) I of echoes
in the labyrinth am lost (for) voice(s)

the lost forever calling search(ing) of
labyrinth echoes in voice(s) (for) I am

echoes of voice(s) lost I the labyrinth
search(ing) forever (for) calling am in

of lost voice(s) in echoes am I forever
calling (for) search(ing) the labyrinth

I am labyrinth lost search(ing) forever
in the echoes of voice(s) (for) calling

(for) in the forever search(ing) echoes
lost I am calling labyrinth of voice(s)

labyrinth search(ing) (for) forever the
echoes of voice(s) I am calling in lost

lost forever search(ing) calling echoes
(for) I am in the labyrinth of voice(s)

voice(s) calling echoes forever lost in
search(ing) (for) the labyrinth of I am

am I calling in lost voice(s) labyrinth
(for) echoes of the forever search(ing)

in the echoes I am lost calling forever
(for) voice(s) of labyrinth search(ing)

search(ing) (for) voice(s) I am lost in
the labyrinth of echoes forever calling

EPIGRAPH-ITI

Persona is a beginning. Persona is how, warily, we talk our way towards Voice. Two would-be lovers. They meet in the tongue. (Kroetsch 24)

*

I know that I struggle to write in my own voice and to hone my own thinking, opposed by deeply internalized roles of feminine decorum and compliance. (Goulston 20)

*

A distinctive tone of voice is one of the rarest things in poetry; I think it is what makes the great poet. (Spender 67)

*

Alongside each utterance, one might say that off-stage voices can be heard: they are the codes: in their interweaving, these voices (whose origin is "lost" in the vast perspective of the _already-written_) de-originate the utterance: the convergence of the voices (of the codes) becomes writing, a stereographic space where the . . . codes, the . . . voices intersect. (Barthes, _S/Z_ 21)

*

Writing with no voice is dead, mechanical, faceless. (Elbow, _Writing_ 287)

*

Of course written words have no "voice"--no idiom, no meaning--except as they are in some sense "spoken" or "heard." Thus, in a sense only partly metaphorical, learning to read and write fluently necessitates learning to hear the text one reads and to speak the text one writes. And since students need to move through varying social situations and encounter different sorts of knowledge and experience, since they have changing moods and purposes, they need to be able to hear and speak a wide range of voices as they read and compose. (Scholl 267)

*

Each writer speaks from the page as individually and as recognizably as he does from his larnyx. (Gilbert, William 32)

*

Begin to write in the dumb, awkward way an animal cries out in pain, and there you will find your intelligence, your words, your voice. (Goldberg 37)

*

The poorest students . . . bring to their texts a radically oversimplified belief that writing should convey the knowledge that exists outside of and prior to writing. Because they can never find that knowledge, their texts never really begin; thus, what occurs in their texts is a lost voice crying to know itself. (Neel 127)

*

I think literature is born from a voice: you discover a voice and you want to give it a body of paper, but it is the voice that will be the reality of the novel. (Fuentes 357)

*

In any writing class . . . the first and constant order of business is to enable all students to establish and develop their individual voices. (Romano 7)

*

The contemporary worker-writer movement operates on a principle . . . that literary production has less to do with "talent" alone than with time, support, confidence and access to the formal means through which to create one's voices and to get straight for oneself and others what it is like and what it has been like to live a particular reality. (Coles, Nicholas 678)

*

[Few students] have been taught to control general rhetorical style, register, punctuation, and expressive features to achieve a sense of voice in their writing. (Halpern 354)

*

I can't keep quiet--I can't be kept out of my voice any longer. (Gupta 180)

*

Nothing is more central to all good writing than this authentic personal voice, this sound of a genuine, deeply engaged author at work finding out what she thinks. (Daniels 261)

*

A writer does well to unify a dense prose with a voice. (Dillard 113)

*

The word entrusted to the poet can be called the essential word. This means primarily that words, having the initiative, are not obliged to serve to designate anything or give voice to anyone, but that they have their ends in themselves. (Blanchot, Space 41)

*

Finding the right voice will help you write better than you ever thought yourself capable of writing. (Macrorie 227)

*

The best writing has voice: the life and rhythms of speech. Unless we actively train our students to speak onto paper, they will write the kind of dead, limp, nominalized prose we hate--or say we hate. (Elbow, "Shifting" 291)

*

Equity fosters the individual voice in the classroom, investing students with confidence in their own authority. Equity unleashes the creative potential of heterogeneity. (Caywood and Overing xi)

*

Voice is simply an analogy, a way of saying that the voice of the writer can be perceived on paper as readily as if the words had been spoken. (Irmscher 164)

*

As an artist you are dealing with a very abstract thing when you are dealing with language (and if you don't realize that, you miss everything), yet suddenly it is there in your mouth with great particularity--drawl, lisp, spit. When the word passes out into the world, that particularity is ignored; print obliterates it; type has no drawl. But if you can write for that caressing, slurring, foul-mouthed singing drunken voice . . . that's a miracle. (Gass 160)

*

Writing needs to be seen as an ideological process whose aims should include teaching students to write as a part of a larger project in which they can affirm their own voices, learn how to exercise the skills of critical interrogation, and, finally, exercise the courage to act in the interests of improving the quality of human life. (Chase 21,22)

*

I have to listen to the writing and nothing else. I have to try and hear the soft but true voice hidden under the loud but clumsy voice in an early draft. (Murray, "Listening" 50)

*

In viewing itself as the unmediated voice of the soul, as the original expression of subjectivity, poetry is blind both to its own status as a code, and to its relation to other codes, that is, to its own necessary mutilation produced by the very process of exclusion on which its sense of wholeness and uniqueness in fact depends. The forces of order which guard the poetic frontier are designed not only to repress, but to erase--wipe clean--the very traces of repression, the very traces of the cleaning operation. (Johnson, Difference 47)

*

No voice is as individual as the poet would like to think. (Merrill 309)

*

Because the whole notion of "voice" is so mystical and abstract, the term "voice" may have become nothing more than a vague phrase conjured up by English teachers to impress and motivate the masses to write more, confess more, and be happy. (Hashimoto 75-76)

*

Voice in lyric is a _figure_. (Culler, "Changes" 50)

*

Obviously, style and self are inextricably bound together in a writer's work, and the voice which they create emerges only after a certain level of writing development has been reached. (Root 84)

*

Is not any writer (even the pure lyricist) always a "dramaturge" in the sense that he directs all words to others' voices, including to the image of the author (and to other authorial masks)? (Bakhtin, _Speech_ 110)

*

Your authentic voice is that authorial voice which sets you apart from every living human being despite the number of common or shared experiences you have with many others: it is not a copy of someone else's way of speaking or of perceiving the world. It is your way. (Stewart, _Voice_ 2-3)

*

The voiceless style embodies a mode of thought quite different from that embodied in more familiar dialects. It is heavily propositional and abstract, a logos-centered dialect, in which the ethos of the author is consciously de-particularized and conventionalized. Yet it is a kind of voice, after all. (Scholl 277)

*

Women's writing is a "double-voiced discourse" that always embodies the social, literary, and cultural heritages of both the muted and the dominant. (Showalter 263)

*

To put it simply, if rather crudely, I see the developed writing process as one of hearing an inner voice dictating forms of the written language appropriate to the task in hand. (Britton, "Shaping" 143-144)

*

Voice is the magic ingredient in writing. It carries all the meanings that are not within the word. (Murray, "Secrets" 152)

*

Whereas writing disperses, voice unifies, providing the illusion of a single origin and temporal unity. (Jacobus 173)

*

Divorcing voice from [the writing] process is like omitting salt from stew, love from sex, or sun from gardening. (Graves 227)

*

Ever since I was first read to, then started reading to myself, there has never been a line read that I didn't hear. As my eyes followed the sentence, a voice was saying it silently to me. It isn't my mother's voice, or the voice of any person I can identify, certainly not my own. It is human, but inward, and it is inwardly that I listen to it. It is to me the voice of the story or the poem itself. The cadence, whatever it is that asks you to believe, the feeling that resides in the printed word, reaches me through the reader-voice. I have supposed, but never found out, that this is the case with all readers--to read as listeners--and with all writers, to write as listeners. (Welty 11-12)

*

Voice is style, tone, personality, energy, concern (Murray, Writer Teaches 21), point of view, mood, sincerity, effectiveness, confidence, directness, clarity (Irmscher 164, 195-196), rhythm, truth, emotion, humanity, liberation, naturalness (Macrorie 159-162), aliveness, warmth, strength, simplicity (Zinsser 5-6), driving force, personal imprint (Graves 227), creativity (Goldberg 26), and stance (Hacker and Renshaw 47).

IF MY WORDS

if my words are line drawings
on a doodle pad, pencil-rubbed
disclosures of the world

if my words are building blocks
that laid one on top of another
are a tower out of/into the abyss

if my words are boundary lines
drawn through the unknown
so it can be known

if my words are candles
driving away darkness
lights on the way

if my words are weapons of war
defending my castle
in a kingdom of usurpers

if my words are Oreo cookies
(double stuf), sweet dark
rotting the stomach

if my words are band-aids
flesh-coloured, hiding a wound
from the sharp air, healing

if my words are seeds
of grain in a field
abundant with weeds

if my words are seeds
of weeds in a field
abundant with grain

if my words are soap bubbles
iridescent colours, chemical
drops, stinging

if my words are Big Mac's
ingested, digested, passed
from here to there, there to here

if my words are stones
in a river, a path
peril, the only way

if my words are toothaches
hints of decay
at the roots

if my words are chisels
chipping/chopping the block
the concealed now revealed

if my words are photographs
a store of memories
a story of play

if my words are love letters
in yellow ribbons
concealed in an attic chest

if my words are strips
of linen swathed visibility
out of invisibility

if my words are balloons
lost in the clouds messages
long remembered/forgotten

if my words are chains
chairs canes cakes
booster cables stacking tables

if my words are clouds
cans shrouds fans
flutes suits boots newts

if my words are gourds
umbilical cords pine boards
marauding hordes majestic lords

are all words equal?
some more equal than others?
what words?

B: WHERE DO(ES) THE VOICE(S) COME FROM?

Peter Elbow defines voice as "juice": "The metaphor comes to me again and again, I suppose, because I'm trying to get at something mysterious and hard to define. 'Juice' combines the qualities of magic potion, mother's milk, and electricity." Still, Elbow admits, "Sometimes I fear I will never be clear about what I mean by voice" (Power 286). And Elbow is right. He will probably never be clear about what voice is. But perhaps he shouldn't be so concerned with being clear.

In reading Peter Elbow I feel like I've stopped at a four-way stop intersection where three other vehicles (all driven by Peter Elbow) have stopped just before me and indicate no sign of proceeding. For Elbow the central characteristic of voice is that "the words somehow issue from the writer's center--even if in a slippery way--and produce resonance which gets the words more powerfully to a reader's center" (298). In Elbow's explanation voice is the manifestation of the writer, the reader, and the text. Elbow equates voice in writing with a power that "comes from inner resonance" (295). He operates with the underlying metaphor that "we all have a chest cavity unique in size and shape so that each of us naturally resonates to one pitch alone" (281-282). He advises:

> If we are brave and persistent enough to sing our own note at length--to develop our capacity for resonance--gradually we will be able to "sing ourselves in": to get resonance first into one or two more frequencies and then more. Finally, we will be able to sing whatever note we want to sing, even to sing whatever note others want to hear, and to make every note resound with rich power. (282)

Elbow also directs his attention to the reader as responsible for determining the resonance of voice in writing:

> The only way we can locate or identify the presence of real voice is through the sensibility of good readers. Since there are no objective criteria, there is no way to verify the judgment of any particular reader. Some people will be better than others at identifying real voice, but in any given instance they may be wrong, no matter how certain they feel. They will hear resonance, but it will be resonance between the words and themselves, not between the words and the writer; or they will hear no resonance, but

> the interference will come from themselves, not from the writer. (300)

But Elbow is not recommending that voice is actualized only by the reader. He admits, "I have been nervous about the charge that what I am calling 'real voice' is just writing that happens to tickle my feelings or my unconscious concerns and has nothing to do with the words' relationship to the writer" (300). Indeed Elbow diminishes the reader's role:

> A few people get their voice into their writing. When you read a letter or something else they've written, it has the sound of them. It feels as though writing with voice has life in it. It's almost as though the breath makes the words themselves do some of the work of getting up off the page into our head as we read. We need only pass our eyes, like phonograph needles, along the grooves and magically sounds and meanings will form in our head. (288)

Taking still a further tack Elbow argues for voice as integrally connected, not to the writer or the reader, but to meaning:

> Real voice is not the sound of an individual personality redolent with vibes, it is the

> sound of a meaning resonating because the individual consciousness of the writer is somehow fully behind or in tune with or in participation with that meaning. (311)

Elbow may never be clear about what he means by voice, but does he need to be clear? In his painstaking and wide-ranging efforts to explain voice he reveals the prismatic (de)composition of the term.

TRUTH IS A TWO-EDGED SWORD

I tried
writing
in an honest
and authentic
and sincere
voice
once

wrote a morning
of notes

Gladys, you ought to shave
Duke, you're a magpie
Judith, your breath smells
Allister, you're boring
Ada, you're killing yourself
Maxwell, you're obese

mailed
misanthropic
malign
melancholic
maniac
malicious
mean
malfeasant
mangy
malformed
mad
missives

learned
the truth
that truth
must be
measured
moderately

now
mealy-mouthed
mendacious
mythomania
for me

C: WHERE DO(ES) THE VOICE(S) COME FROM?

Pierre Macherey interrogates the ideological production of subjects, the ways by which forms of subjectivity and hierarchical class, gender, racial, and sexual relations are produced, regulated, transformed, constrained, liberated, and empowered. According to Macherey ideology is not "a system of ideas" but the "material objective practices which participate effectively in the development of material life" (43). He expands Louis Althusser's view that

> ideology is constituted by a certain number of ideological practices whose concrete realization is to be found in those ideological state apparatuses which ensure the perpetuation of the ideological superstructure in a given society. (50)

Robert Young adds helpfully:

> To study ideology is to study not ideas, but the material practices of certain (religious, educational, familial, legal, etc.) ideological state apparatuses and the processes by which subjects become constituted in ideology. (79)

Through the practices of the church, the school, the media, the family, the legal system, people are interpellated as subjects into socially determined ways of seeing and knowing and believing and acting.

Hence, there is no fixed-center subject, no monolithic, uniform, sovereign, autonomous subject position which is inherent in biology or philosophy or psychology, which is mine by unconscious or genetic or ontological imperative. Instead I am a floating subject, a plural subject, a moving subject constantly influenced by and influencing processes of formation, information, reformation, conformation, deformation, and transformation. As Catherine A. MacKinnon observes, we are "socially constructed yet constructing" (107).

Understanding subjectivity as produced by the mechanisms of ideology supports Henri Lefebvre's contention that "human beings are their own self-creations: they create themselves" (87). In a similar way Joseph Harris suggests that "we are what our languages make of us and what we can make of our languages" (169). As part of that ongoing self-creation we adopt and construct a range of voices for use in a multiplicity of public and private spheres. We learn to use the voices of discourse communities. We learn to enunciate our relations to the world in terms of the demands and strictures of those discourse communities. What is learned much less readily is how to influence subversively and constructively the processes of discursive positioning. As an active subject I do not have to accept mutely the positions inscribed by ideology. I do not have to write in the voices prescribed by particular discursive formations.

For example, my writing does not have to be spontaneous, authentic, simple, direct, clear, sincere, original, or honest, all qualities constituted and propagated and valorized in a socially determined process of ideological production. I can applaud Gary Sloan's contention:

> The hegemony of the plain style is a logical accompaniment to the spiraling impact of electronic media, to the decline in literacy, and to the gradual supersession of a Liberal Arts by a technological curriculum. (1)

I can question the hegemony of writing practices which are too seldom questioned. I can renovate the reader's perception of and response to writing by exposing the hidden but potent domination of practices which govern the cultural reception of meaning. I can politicize voice by demonstrating that voice is a political choice.

Ideology, therefore, both empowers and intimidates the exercise and development of voice(s). On the one hand, ideology provides parameters in which my writing seeks order, expression, communication. On the other hand, ideology restricts what and how I am permitted to write (or at least my perception of what and how I am permitted to write). My ideological conception of language use determines what I can and cannot do (or at least what I might and might not do).

THIS POEM WILL NEVER BE PUBLISHED BECAUSE

I AM

Canadian
Eastern Canadian
Newfoundlander
young
old
(not) middle-aged
not female, male
not especially
male or female
Caucasian
not Black
Oriental
native
short
teacher/student
father (knows best)
heterosexual
not lesbian
Christian with no desire
to sail an ark
with constipated
animals
happy
(most of the time)
hairy
(all the time)
clinging
to hope
degreed/graduated
poor
not in jail
apparently sane
actually warped
used
married
unbrave
addicted
to coffee
and books

D: WHERE DO(ES) THE VOICE(S) COME FROM?

For Mikhail Bakhtin writing is "a living mix of varied and opposing voices . . . developing and renewing itself" (Dialogic 49). He argues that "verbal discourse is a social phenomenon--social throughout its entire range and in each and every of its factors" (259). He is concerned that

> stylistics defines itself as a stylistics of 'private craftsmanship' and ignores the social life of discourse outside the artist's study, discourse in the open spaces of public squares, streets, cities and villages, of social groups, generations and epochs. (259)

Bakhtin stresses the way individuals impress their individual voices on language which is always other-voiced:

> As a living, socio-ideological concrete thing, as heteroglot opinion, language, for the individual consciousness, lies on the borderline between oneself and the other. The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes "one's own" only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and

> expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language (it is not, after all, out of a dictionary that the speaker gets his words!), but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one's own. (293-294)

Bakhtin's understanding of language use as integrally and inextricably related to social discourse suggests that every writer is part of a community, a participant in a chorus of voices, drawing on the resources of the community in order to perform that which is both new and not-new, thereby replenishing the resources of the community.

PROBLEMATIZING THE QUEST WITH QUESTIONS

1. What is voice?

2. As a writer do I have a single and consistent voice or multiple and variable voices? Can my voice(s) change from text to text and still be distinctively mine? Is it ethical to change my voice(s) to meet the expectations of specific audiences and the demands of certain subjects?

3. How can I account for the common experience of hearing an author's voice when I read? Do I hear the author's voice? Does the voice belong to the narrator or the author? When I read a personal letter or an anecdote by a person I know, why am I convinced that the person is almost speaking to me?

4. What is the relation between voice and intention?

5. What is there of desire in voice?

6. As a reader how much of the experience of voice do I generate as part of my productive encounter with the text?

7. How is voice determined and influenced by the writer's choice of diction, form, organization, shape, and typography? How is voice related to the texture of language use like brushwork in painting?

8. How is voice determined and influenced by the demands and prescriptions of writing textbooks?

9. What is the relation between a serious voice and a playful voice? Is a serious voice valorized over a humourous voice? Why or why not?

10. How workable is the advice often given to beginning writers: Write in your own voice? Do beginning writers know what "your own voice" is? Do the people who advise beginning writers, Write in your own voice, know what "your own voice" is?

11. As a writer am I trying to find the right words to voice the right emotions and right ideas, or are the right words trying to find the right writer in order to be voiced?

12. How self-conscious is voice? Do I want to be held personally responsible and accountable for all voices in my writing?

13. Why do I experience an insatiable and irrepressible need and desire to voice experience, to give voice(s) to experience, to experience voice(s)?

14. Can voice in writing be developed? How?

15. Why was I offended when a reader commented (several other readers concurred) that one of my stories sounded like a prissy high school English essay?

16. Is the term voice used so loosely that it has become useless as a signifier? Is the term voice used so loosely that it has become useful as a signifier?

17. Is voice a fundamental technique of order, a framework which guides the reading process? Who or what is in control?

18. What is the relationship between voice and power?

19. In what ways can voices be liberated? Do voices need to be liberated?

20. Is voice socially constructed?

21. How does voice help structure writing? How does writing help structure voice?

22. Are some voices more effective than others?

23. Are there people(s) without voices?

24. Is voice borrowed? inherent? inherited?

25. How are voices suppressed? Do all voices have an equal claim to the privilege of being voiced?

26. How are the effects of voice generated? Who generates the effects of voice?

27. Is the tentative, probing voice of questions underrated while the more assured, declarative voice of statements is overrated? Or vice versa?

28. Is a plain, simple voice valorized over a convoluted, obscure voice? Why or why not?

29. What might be the result if beginning writers were advised: Do not write in your own voice?

30. Why do the business writer, the technical writer, the academic writer, the bureaucratic writer, the

children's writer, the romance writer, the theological writer, the pornographic writer, the newsmagazine writer often have different voices? Where do they find their voices?

31. Can writing be voiceless?

32. When I read do I respond to the voice(s) in the writing in the same way I respond when listening to a speaker's voice(s)?

33. Can voice be defined with definiteness?

34. Does voice emanate from a subject or from a subject position? Does subjectivity emanate from voice?

35. Do all readers hear the same voices? Do readers hear the same voices in texts as their authors hear?

36. To what extent do texts produce and create and construct and contain and control voice(s)?

37. What is the relation between voice in writing and voice in oracy? Is the voice in my writing the same as the voice in my speaking?

38. Do I hear the same voices every time I read a text? Do I hear the same voices when I write a text and when I read the text?

39. What voice(s) characterize(s) writing that is clear, unified, coherent, and emphatic?

40. Can voice be summarized with a few descriptors, such as, poignant, satirical, sentimental, bold?

41. Is there an impersonal, logical, rational, linear, objective, public, theoretical voice? Is there a personal, intimate, subjective, private, exploratory, emotional voice?

42. Is the voice I experience or perceive in a text the same voice I explain I have experienced or perceived?

43. How is voice connected to connotation?

44. How is voice connected to personal experience?

45. Could voice be experienced in reading a randomly generated sequence of letters of the alphabet?

46. What is the effect of contravening the generic conventions which govern voice in technical writing?

47. Does it matter if readers of my poems hear different voices than I hear?

48. How is voice related to psychoanalytic processes?

49. How is voice related to the texture, colour, and size of the paper on which writing is printed?

50. How does knowledge of an author's biography influence the voices heard in her writing?

51. How is voice related to spelling and grammatical correctness?

52. How is voice related to dialects?

53. How is voice politically determined?

54. How is voice historically determined?

55. Is voice an element in a fiction that posits writing as a communication between two people?

56. How is a writer's voice validated, confirmed, authorized, legitimized?

57. Can a voice be original? How?

58. Does the concept of voice necessitate the concept of audience?

59. How can a voice be trustworthy? reliable? Is a trustworthy, reliable voice more valued than an untrustworthy, unreliable voice? Why or why not?

60. What is an authentic voice? How can I write with an authentic voice? Do I have only one authentic voice? Is the authentic voice immutable? Why is the authentic voice valorized? What is an inauthentic voice? Is the current notion of what constitutes an authentic writing voice no more than a culturally constructed and sanctioned and promoted rhetorical device which is currently popular and may be replaced by a new fashion?

61. How can readers be guaranteed that the voice in writing is honest and sincere? Why do we regard an honest and sincere voice as important?

62. Why do many writing teachers prioritize a kind of writing voice over other kinds? Should some voices be prioritized over other voices? Why or why not?

63. How is voice related to scription, the manual activity of writing with a pen or pencil or typewriter or word processor?

64. As a writer am I an echo of others' voices, or do I have a voice of my own?

65. How much do I want to call attention to voice? Why?

66. How much is the unique voice just clever, done once, and therefore noniterable?

67. How is voice related to the illusion of presence? What is the effect of diminishing the illusion of presence?

68. What is the origin of my voice?

69. Do I find a voice by rebelling against the voices of others?

70. Am I granted/given/awarded a voice by others?

71. What is it possible to say? What is it possible to hear?

72. Why is my interjected voice (my inserted and grafted and thrust voice) strident and loud and critical?

73. Why is my voice when it repeats and quotes and echoes the voices of others considered unoriginal?

74. If a text has (a) voice(s), does the text also listen?

75. Because trees must be cut down in order to make paper in order to provide a site for my voice, to allow my voice to perform, is that a waste of trees?

76. Am I like Huckleberry Hound who advertised his

circus act: THE MAN WITH A THOUSAND FACES? (When Huckleberry Hound displayed his faces, one after the other, the thousand faces--at least the part of the thousand he showed; I lost count--were all the same. The Man with a Thousand Faces had one face.) Am I the writer with a thousand voices which are one voice?

77. Does it really matter if the voice of a poem is identified with an anonymous poet, a poet about whom much is known or little is known, a speaker constructed in the poem by the poet and constituted or actualized by the reader?

78. Must the voice in writing be unified and seamless? Why not schizophrenic?

79. What is the relation between voice and silence?

80. Are voices costumes worn for particular functions and purposes? Are voices like clothes, different clothes appropriate for different occasions? Do tastes concerning voice change? Do we determine by cultural consensus what constitutes acceptable voices in writing?

81. Is voice a weapon in an arsenal? a tool in a tool chest? an instrument in an orchestra?

82. What is the motivation for writing, for inserting my voice in the chorus of voices?

83. Why am I compelled to make the voice in my writing

seem logical, witty, erudite, imaginative, complex? Am I successful?

84. Is there a universal feminine language, style, practice, voice? Can there be one feminine language, style, practice, voice?

85. Does the notion of a woman's voice iron out the differences in women's experiences?

86. Is voice related to the body? How?

87. Is it useful to label voice as masculine or feminine? Why or why not?

88. In what ways have women's voices been muted?

89. Can voice be patriarchal or man-centered? How?

90. What is a dominant voice?

91. Have women's voices been suppressed by a male-determined, male-dominated hierarchy that favours linear, logical prose to personal, exploratory prose?

92. Is the typical feminine voice autobiographical, confessional, sensitive, intuitive, personal, emotional, natural, anti-authoritarian, close to experiences of the body? Is such a description of "the typical feminine voice" just one more way of ghettoizing and muting women's voices?

93. Is there a danger of constructing a feminine voice which is identified only by its difference from a masculine voice instead of by its cooperation and involvement and interaction with a masculine voice?

94. How do the experiences of race, culture, and class influence a woman's voice? a man's voice? Would a black, working-class, lesbian writer have the same kind of voice as a white, college-educated, heterosexual woman writer?

95. What is the relationship between women's voices and men's voices? Can the voices be transposed?

96. Is a woman's voice historically/socially constructed or genetically constructed?

97. Is the mode of questioning--tentative, indefinite, open, probing--closer to a feminine voice than a masculine voice? Does this question signify a masculine questioner?

98. Is voice like a thumbprint--unique, one in the universe?

99. Is voice mimetic and/or metonymic and/or metaphorical?

ETYMOLOGY OF VOICE

1

I voice (ACTIVE voice)
I am voiced (PASSIVE voice)

2

voice/NO/voice

3

ORGAN of voice/voice of ORGAN

4

MY
voice
YOUR

5

with ONE voice/with MANY voices

6

to GIVE to
voice
to FIND in

7

call FOR voices/call OF voices

8

IN voice

OUT OF

9

voiced/voice(FULL)/unvoiced/voice(LESS)

10

GAIN
          voice
LOSE

11

voice of (E)CHO(ICE)/(E)CHO(ICE) of voice

12

voice/vote
voicing the void
voice/view
voicing the world
revising/revoicing
voicing the vision

13

I voice (ACTIVE voice)
dividing the veil
bridging the vale
voice/FULL of desire

14

I am voiced (PASSIVE voice)
unsealed from stone
revealed vein
voice/FILLED with desire

15

voice(s)
of
thunder/praise/trumpet/conscience/heart/memory/nations
stream/wind/sparrow/suffering/God/silence/trees/you/me
voice(s)
echo
ing
with
out
end

F: WHERE DO(ES) THE VOICE(S) COME FROM?

Diana Hacker and Betty Renshaw in Writing with a Voice: A Rhetoric and Handbook advise that "the right voice . . . will be a voice appropriate to your purpose in writing and to the particular audience you have in mind" (42). They observe that writing only for the teacher often results in "voiceless 'assignment prose'" (43) and recommend writing for readers that are purposefully envisioned (45). Moreover, they note that "writers are something like actors" who adopt different stances and voices (49). Hacker and Renshaw discuss the choice of an appropriate voice, when to use a formal or informal voice, an "in-group" or standard voice, a technical or plain voice (53-59).

But as Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford indicate in "Audience Addressed/Audience Invoked: The Role of Audience in Composition Theory and Pedagogy," the issue of audience is complicated. On the one hand, they explain:

> Those who envision audience as addressed emphasize the concrete reality of the writer's audience; they also share the assumption that knowledge of this audience's attitudes, beliefs, and expectations is not only possible (via observation and analysis) but essential. (156)

On the other hand, they explain:

> Those who envision audience as invoked stress that the audience of a written discourse is a construction of the writer . . . . They do not, of course, deny the physical reality of readers, but they argue that writers simply cannot know this reality in the way that speakers can. The central task of the writer, then, is not to analyze an audience and adapt discourse to meet its needs. Rather, the writer uses the semantic and syntactic resources of language to provide cues for the reader--cues which help define the role or roles the writer wishes the reader to adopt in responding to the text. (160)

While it is one thing for me to construct a sense of audience in my text, to posit a role for my readers, it is another thing for actual readers to accept that role. Moreover, as the reader-response theorists emphasize, it is imperative not to underestimate the reader's role as actively involved in a transaction with the text. As Wolfgang Iser explains:

> The work is more than the text, for the text only takes on life when it is realized, and furthermore the realization is by no means

> independent of the individual disposition of the reader--though this in turn is acted upon by the different patterns of the text. (50)

In "Writing for Readers: Three Perspectives on Audience" Barry M. Kroll adds helpfully: "The view of the audience often is one of a 'target receiver' toward which writers aim their persuasive darts" (175). And he confirms the reader-response orientation:

> Readers are not passive targets, they use their previous knowledge and active processing strategies to construct the meaning of a text. And the view of a "target receiver" oversimplifies the writer's task: writers are not employed in shooting missiles at targets; they are engaged in a complicated form of social interaction. (175)

As Ede and Lunsford conclude, "The most complete understanding of audience thus involves a synthesis of the perspectives we have termed audience addressed, with its emphasis on the reader, and audience invoked, with its focus on the writer" (167).

There can be no hierarchical relationship between the author and the reader since both author and reader are subjects in language. Even in anonymous texts there is a subject position (implied author, narrative voice, speaker) which performs the authorial function. Moreover, the text constructs subject positions for the reader (implied reader, narratee, empirical reader). To read a text is to enter a power struggle, a wrestling contest between author and reader carried out in the arena of the text. And paradoxically it is the resistant reader (one who resists the author's text, who refutes, negates, criticizes the text, in turn producing a text of her own) who has the least difficulty entering the text. Moreover, the most productive resistant reader is the reader who not only resists the author's text but also resists her own texts as they are produced. The resistant reader operates with the assumption that both she and the author are constructing "truth." They are pilgrims in a meaning-making experience.

EYE
I

perhaps it is true
that the I
in my poems
is not me
a fictional I only
an I that is always
                 Other
always you
      but
the written I
the spoken I
is the eye
of the writer/speaker
(by)(through)(in) which
the world is known
and when I
write/read/speak
the I in my poems
that I becomes the eye
a site situated
on the narrow base
        of   I
where I stand
where the I
I claim as mine
knows
     its difference
knows
     its significance

G: WHERE DO(ES) THE VOICE(S) COME FROM?

Jacques Lacan has significantly modified the psychoanalytic theories of Sigmund Freud. Lacan emphasizes the constitution of subjectivity in language. Lacan observes that around the age of six months children are fascinated with their reflections in mirrors. The image which is seen is the image of an autonomous, whole self. At the same time this image is perceived as separate and other as well as desired and aspired to. Following this mirror stage children are inaugurated into the symbolic order of language involving the same tension between the image as other and the desire for that image. Catherine Belsey clarifies this tension:

> The mirror-phase, in which the infant perceives itself as other, an image, exterior to its own perceiving self, necessitates a splitting between the I which is perceived and the I which does the perceiving. The entry into language necessitates a secondary division which reinforces the first, a split between the I of discourse, the subject of the *énoncé*, and the I who speaks, the subject of the enunciation . . . . There is thus a contradiction between the conscious self, the

> self which appears in its own discourse, and the self which is only partly represented there, the self which speaks. (64-65)

As Kaja Silverman explains, a critical Lacanian assumption is that "the human subject derives from an original whole which was divided in half" and whose "existence is dominated by the desire to recover its missing complement" (152). Likewise Richard Harland concludes that "the confirmation of individual selfhood is the ultimate desire" (39). Harland also notes that this desire is "a kind of desire that nothing can ever truly satisfy" (41).

The human subject desires the other. Robert Viscusi suggests that the subject's ongoing search for the other is operative in the process of writing:

> Everyone has heard, and many have said, "I don't know what I want to say until I see it." In writing, there springs up quickly a dialogue between writer and the text being written, so that it is characteristic for us to generate a third line by reading over lines one and two. Those lines which have already been set down acquire, while the writing continues, a provisionsal authority. They become what-I-see-of-what-I-want-to-say.

> But, no longer merely what-I-want-to-say, they become what-is-said and what-is-written. They are no longer the writer's voice but something other, something removed to the plane of what may be desired or imitated or obeyed. (231)

For Viscusi "the process of making one's own voice other _is_ the process of writing" (231). He explains:

> Lacanian theory presents us with the notion that simply in acquiring language, we institute the other-speaking which both deludes us and makes us what we are; the steps in the process are what Lacan isolates in the discourse of the Other in analysis, and which we experience as writers in dialogue with our own evolving texts, our own other-speaking. (234)

In my writing I am compelled by a sense of lack and a desire for completion. In my writing I experience the ego that is not transcendent but a temporary point or a discursive position in the field of language, the decentered and uncentered self that has no inviolable essence, the subject that is unstable and indefinitely displaced, caught up in an ongoing process of constitution in the symbolic order of language and social function. In my writing I seek to give a face to _I_, but the _I_ in my writing is constantly effacing itself, slipping away, revealing only its multiplicity, its unconsummated relationships in a system of signs where identity is defined by difference from the other. In my writing I am scribbling words on an ocean beach, temporary inscription washed away by the tide which leaves a blank beach for further inscription.

DISCOURSE ON SUBJECTIVITY
(or, What Kind of I am I?)

a

I'm sitting near a coffee vending machine
in the basement lounge of the library
(coffee and a Snickers bar for lunch)

people pass
clones in Klein/Ellis/Hechter clothes
like me
each whispering/proclaiming
I'M ME

in a dark blue suit and dark blue tie
would I be me?
or not me?
or another me?

e

I am I/everyone else is you
in a world familiar and strange
where
1 I
+
5 000 000 000 you's
=
5 000 000 000 I's
+
1 you

if what
I know
of the world
I know
from the subject position
of my I
can I transcend
my I
in order to know
the world
in its fullness/difference

o

epistemological graffiti on the coffee vending machine

to BE is to DO
        Kant (the German school)
to DO is to BE
        Carlyle (the British school)
DO BE DO BE DO
        Sinatra (the American school)
BE a DO BEE
        Miss Ann (the Pre-school)

u

a woman in a pink coat
slides to the coffee machine
almost punches
the black coffee button
the light only button
the sugar and light button
        turns
eyes like purple orchids in snow
        whispers

HOW are you?

I am Homo sapiens
bones, organs, muscles, brain
a melancholy creature
of diverse humours

how ARE you?

Am I?
Am I a phenomenal presence
in a noumenal world?
Am I when alone? not alone?
Perhaps I am not

how are YOU?

Am I a you?
I am me
or at least I pretend
I am me in order to know me
but this you you pretend to know
is a you I do not know

the pink coat is sliding away
I'm fine, you?
away
I'm fine, you?
away
I'm fine, you?
gone

(sometimes) y

IUIIIIUIIUIII
IIUIIIUIIUI
IUIIIIIUI
IIIUIII
IIIUI
IUI
I

H: WHERE DO(ES) THE VOICE(S) COME FROM?

Paul de Man explains that the speaker or voice in a poem is a figure constructed in language:

> The principle of intelligibility, in lyric poetry, depends on the phenomenalization of the poetic voice. Our claim to understand a lyric text coincides with the actualization of a speaking voice, be it (monologically) that of the poet or (dialogically) that of the exchange that takes place between author and reader in the process of comprehension. ("Lyrical" 55)

And Herbert F. Tucker observes:

> While texts do not absolutely lack speakers, they do not simply have them either; they invent them instead as they go. Texts do not come from speakers, speakers come from texts . . . . To assume in advance that a poetic text proceeds from a dramatically situated speaker is to risk missing the play of verbal implication whereby character is engendered in the first place. (243)

When my poetry is read by acquaintances, a typical reaction is: O, I can't believe that you acted (or spoke or thought) that way. The voice in the poem and the person that the reader construes as the speaker are too readily equated with the writer. Readers phenomenalize the voice of the text as the author's voice. Needed is a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between the empirical world and the world of the poem, between the poet as a person in society and the poet as a voice in her poetry. Readers need to be aware that the voice in writing is a figure or rhetorical device inscribed in language and that as readers they phenomenalize and incarnate the voice in their meaning-making response.

Nevertheless, de Man also warns:

> It is essential that the status of the voice not be reduced to being a mere figure of speech or play of the letter, for this would deprive it of the attribute of aesthetic presence that determines the hermeneutics of the lyric. (55)

And Tucker echoes de Man:

> To insist that textuality is all and that the play of the signifier usurps the recreative illusion of character is to turn back at the threshold of interpretation, stopping our ears to both lyric cries and historical imperatives, and from our studious cells overhearing nothing. (243)

As Walter Ong suggests, "writer and reader are distanced from one another by a thousand conventions, and tied to one another by them too, at a distance" ("Mimesis" 30). The productive reader is both wary and gracious, on the one hand, conscious that she labours in her reading to help constitute the textual voice with personality and character and bones and flesh, and, on the other hand, cautious to avoid equating the incarnated voice with the author who is always less than and more than any paper person.

THE ORIGINAL ECHO

the nymph Echo loved to talk and insisted on the last word until Juno searching for her wayward husband among the nymphs grew angry with Echo's chatter full of wile (while the nymphs hid) and cursed her with the last word only, always reply, never the first word, never an original word, and attracted to Narcissus, Echo could only repeat his words, words Narcissus heard as mimicry, words that imitated his words only, words that held not even promise or deferral, only frustration, and Narcissus rejected Echo till Echo withered away, gaunt and craggy like rock, a voice inhabiting mountain caves, the voice of the last word only, a word of response, never an originary word, never an initiatory word, never a word of constitutive power, the imitative word only

ECHOES

One of my earliest poems, written when I was about seventeen, preserved in a binder of scraps like photographs of people and places known but only faintly remembered:

UNTITLED

twenty-five heads
a dog comes in the door
a garbage can with a garbage bag
NO SMOKING
laughing talking
I stand
everybody looks at me
(to be continued)

*

Always wanting/needing to speak/write, the audience waiting, attentive even, but the speaking/writing always deferred, promised, unconsummated. The voice is mute. Why?

*

When I write I hear voices, the same voices heard in Aesop's fable about the father, his son, and a donkey. Walking to market neither the father nor the son ride on the donkey until somebody comments that it is stupid to lead a donkey by a rope when it might carry a passenger. So the father seats the son on the donkey until somebody observes that the son is disrespectful to ride while his father walks. Then the father rides on the donkey till he is called lazy. The father and son are criticized for being heartless when they both ride the little donkey and for being imbecilic when they carry the donkey. Finally they resume their initial arrangement--walking and leading the donkey by the rope.

*

I feel restricted by the discourse communities I write for. Like the expectation or requirement to wear a necktie (utterly useless except as a napkin) in certain social situations, discourse communities constrain writing by dictating adherence to specific conventions.

*

(January 2, 1988) Began writing a new story about my parents. Mother would like me to write a story about growing up on Lynch's Lane, a John Boy Walton kind of story, but I think she will be disappointed with my stories. I want to write about ugliness and sadness and pain and brokenness. I want to be unflinching. I don't want to write stories for Reader's Digest or the church newsletter. I want to be revelatory and challenging and prophetic.

*

Anyone who has ever used words--spoken, heard, read, written, thought, felt words--knows that words are often more seductive than productive, always promising precision and delivering delusion, never quite saying what you thought you said or heard, what you meant or thought was meant.

*

Like a collector of butterflies who mounts his specimens in order to observe them deliberately and intently, the goal of my writing is often to use words to pin down truth, conviction, assurance. I interact with the words dialogically, intimately, passionately. Alone at a desk I converse with the words and the conversation is animated and exhausting. It leaves me both exhilarated and attenuated. The experience is overwhelming with desire, my desire to shape and control the words, my desire to disclose my world in words, my desire to be shaped and controlled by the words, my desire to be disclosed in words. But for all the expectation and desire involved in writing, the consummation is never total. Unlike the dead, mounted butterfly, language slips and slides. It promises and tantalizes.

*

In July 1976 I wrote in my journal: I find it difficult to rewrite my poems and generally prefer to let the original version remain with occasional minor alterations. It is so much more fun to just write and write.

In July 1988 I wrote in my journal: I once hated revising. Now I spend more time on revising than on any other part of the writing process. And the revising is fun. Beginning and breaking off are the hard parts of writing.

*

I want to reach out to people and say hello and ask them how life is going and whether or not they're happy and point out how wonderfully blue the sky is, but I say nothing, seldom ever say the words I really want to say.

*

As a writer in school I almost always felt inadequate, not quite sure where to put commas, concerned that I didn't have anything worth saying, convinced that I was inferior because I wrote slowly, ashamed that my drafts were so messy with notes in different colors of ink and arrows that went to the margins and the back of the sheet and to other numbered scraps of paper when I ran out of space on the first sheet. I was sure everybody else wrote as if transcribing dictation from speakers inside their heads or hearts or souls or stomachs. I heard voices, too, but they were always too quiet or too loud or too contradictory, voices that drowned one another out, voices that I could never master.

*

An early poem:

I WAS TOLD

I was told to write a short-lined poem,
started to write,
and discovered that prose is not poetry:
could I convince a publisher that I write
proetry?

*

Only in my late twenties did I begin to write out of my personal experiences, out of my emotions (my joy and pain), out of my understanding of myself and my world. As I respond to personal experiences in my writing, I disclose my world. I make sense of it. I write about what is important to me; I share my world; I grow in humanness. I write about people, places, and problems with personal pertinence, hoping that other people will see themselves in that personal experience, too. In effect I am nurturing my voices and introducing those voices into an expansive chorus of voices.

*

(January 9, 1988) Worked on the story much of the day--too much I'm afraid. The story is developing, growing, percolating, baking. It is being disclosed, constructed, made, formed. I'm reasonably happy with the story I am making. It is not the story I had anticipated. It is not autobiographical--as a writer I enjoy so much the rare privilege of making stories end the way I would like them to, working out events to a pleasing conclusion, unlike the uncontrollable messiness of real life.

*

Always surprised by the words I write, filling blank pages with blue-ink squiggles, discovering meaning, searching for what I want to say, writing and reading and writing, the writing speaking, revealing meaning.

*

In my writing I hear voices, nagging, emotional, painful, severe, whimsical, confused, moralistic, eccentric, subversive, cajoling, whimpering, giggling voices, a volatile gab session, a self-help encounter group, the bemused, animated conversation of lovers.

*

There are clearly times in my writing when the writing takes over, forges its own directions, discloses connections and causes and insights that I do not control, at least consciously.

*

Writing is a group discussion in which the text, the reader, the author, the social context, the discourse community are integrally and inextricably connected in an intertextual relationship of meaning-making without end.

*

My school experiences as a student in the latter fifties and the sixties were mainly happy ones. And I know that my passion for words was encouraged by most of my teachers, but about language arts I mainly remember that I memorized biographical sketches of poets, parsed sentences in convoluted diagrams that filled the page, and lost myself late at night among the subtleties of comma usage. On those infrequent occasions when I was required or permitted to write, I wrote compositions and stories about wild stallions and grizzly bears and adventures in London. (I grew up in a mill-town in Newfoundland where there are no wild horses or grizzly bears, and what I knew about London I learned from television.) I never wrote about my one trip to the French island of St. Pierre or about picking up empty bottles or about my sense of sharp conviction when I was nine that I was hell-bound because I knew that Pikey played strip poker with Holly and Cathy or about my grandmother who laughed with tears telling stories about Old Man Giles carting away the waste from the outhouses.

*

We know ourselves and others through language. Words have creative efficacy. Like a child's doodle pad where hidden pictures are resurrected by rubbing a pencil over the white page, the world is given life through words. There is no understanding that is not constructed in language. Our perceptions, our emotions, our reflections are all made possible by our facility with language. Not unlike God's initial creative activity operative in his spoken word, we speak, write, read, think ourselves into existence.

*

In order to write well I must write often. In order to write often I must have a desire to explore my world in words. In order to have a desire for words I must write often and well.

*

The voice in writing is shot through with the voices of discourse communities. Every text bears traces of other texts: citations, references, structural codes, allusions, phrases, images, generic conventions, themes. To conceive of my writing as entering into an intertextual relationship with a discourse community, a world of textuality, suggests that my voice recalls or convenes the voices of absent predecessors, our voices, in effect, calling to one another and echoing one another.

*

In all the years of writing in school I recall only one writing assignment (a story about a boy and a black stallion) that anybody ever commended. An uncle liked the story so much, he requested that I read it to him every time he visited. (Two decades later he still mentions that story.)

*

One of the common operations that comprise the codes of academic writing is to bounce off another's ideas in a counterargument, a type of discourse not unlike children's vociferous debates about whose father is the strongest and biggest and smartest. I am growing tired with trying to puff myself up by deflating somebody else, by trying to shout/weep/laugh more loudly than everybody else in order to drown out the voices of others.

*

An early poem:

I TRIED

short-lined poems
can say so much
when the poet
has a concise
mind and a thor-
ough knowledge
of the English
language, but why baby-step in the confines of a cell
when you can lope and prance merrily among the clouds

*

(January 11, 1988) I finished the story, or at least I finished typing a version of the story or at least a part of the story. I'm pleased with it, but I'm always reluctant to share my fiction with the writing class, not because I lack confidence in my fiction, but because each class is conducted as a roast. Let's find absolutely everything wrong with this story and expose it in its awkward nakedness. The student whose writing is under consideration is required to sit in silence while the professor and the other students castigate him/her for writerly sins he/she wittingly or unwittingly perpetrated. When the victim has been scourged with verbal whips until he/she is screaming inwardly with the pain of sweat in raw wounds, the generous opportunity for defense is proffered, but is seldom more than the ugly spectacle of a punch-drunk wrestler flailing his/her arms at a vigorous tag-team of twelve or more Huns.

*

I hear voices in my writing and I respond to the voices, but as I proceed in the forest of language, the voices recede and can never be caught. Still, the chase is good.

*

Recently my nine-year-old daughter Anna showed me a story she was writing. After reading her story with smiles and compliments I suggested a few changes. She screwed up her face like I'd squeezed mustard up her nose and protested that the story was finished. In my zeal to be like the wise father in "Leave It to Beaver," I proclaimed that a writer always writes and rewrites and rewrites.

Anna replied, "Ah, Dad, you're a real writer."

I was surprised and saddened with her attitude. For three years Anna has been involved in classes with enriched language arts programs characterized by frequent writing, wide publishing, and abundant praise and encouragement. Yet she still doesn't see herself as a writer.

What kinds of attitudes do we have about writers? A little deified perhaps? Wielding a mighty pen? Perceivers of unknown worlds? God-inspired? Gifted with hereditary traits encoded in DNA molecules? Published by McClelland and Stewart? Our attitudes are often restrictive and elitist and misguided.

*

I convene the voices of other writers in my writing, cooperatively and competitively. I want support (as in a foundation), but I also want to build on that foundation something new, something different, like voicing my own rendition or interpretation of a song.

*

My writing is a struggle with recalcitrant language to express, describe, communicate, disclose, construct meaning, a struggle without end. When I write I am acutely aware of the chaos of notes, ideas, quotations, hunches, emotions, experiences, memories, and sensations that swarm about in the air near my pen like bees in a hive. I start and stop, run down one path only to discover that I've already run down it, climb a tree to find my way and see the way from the top of the tree but never from the ground, retrace my tracks, barge into the unknown forest, at times growing weary and other times bustling with hyperactive energy, not quite sure where the destination is or when I will find it but enjoying the journey anyway. Are there writers whose essays and poems and stories just flow out of them? I put my writing together like a jig-saw puzzle, piece by piece, always searching for the elusive right piece.

*

I was years and years overcoming the bad habits instilled in me by well-meaning English teachers who drilled me in grammar and writing exercises till I was convinced that I could only turn abruptly to the right and left or march straight ahead. My writing was the feeble mechanical offspring of intercourse with conventions and rules and the teacher's red pencil, of intercourse without desire. And as a teacher I perpetuated the same bad habits for too long, until I began writing with an earnest wish to construct my world and to share my world with others. Then I learned that I had a voice--boisterous and playful, pertinent and germane--a voice filled with desire. And desire seeks its object. Writers who write with desire will write desirable writing.

*

So much modern fiction is slick, commercial, cynical, witty, soulless, lacking the fire and emotion and hope of real people. I don't want to write that kind of fiction. But the temptation is not easily avoided.

*

I experience/know/understand my life as an episodic narrative broader in scope than Leo Tolstoy's War and Peace. My life is a series of stories in which I am often the main character. As a human being I am compelled/condemned to story-making out of the complex abundance of life, out of the manifold messiness of life. We are all writers compelled/condemned to story-making.

*

I am a subject in process. There is no stable, autonomous, readily identifiable core that is "Carl Leggo." I have a physical body. I occupy different positions in relation to other bodies. I perform different functions. I wear different labels: husband, father, student, Christian, poet. My identity as Carl Leggo is significantly the conjunction of positionality and function and publicly inscribed titles. And my identity is plastic and fluid, malleable and adaptive.

I am a subject in process, unfulfilled and searching, involved in an ontological quest with only an illusory Holy Grail at the end.

*

I grew up in Corner Brook, Newfoundland. At the center of the city was the world's biggest pulp and paper mill where my father worked and where most of the fathers of my friends worked. Outside of school the only person I knew who read poetry was an uncle, a linesman, who loved to recite Robert Service. If I wanted books I ordered them from Boston (Whitman Classics in exchange for stars on bags of Scotties potato chips) or selected them from a drug-store rack (best-sellers from New York City). In school I read the Romantics and Bliss Carman. Not until I was eighteen years old did I read Allan Sillitoe's _Saturday Night, Sunday Morning_--a lean, painful book about vulgar people finding life a bit of a hard go, the kind of people I knew intimately, lives intermingled with little joys and big catastrophes. I liked the book and I liked the people. Sillitoe had written about my personal world.

*

One of my most common experiences as a writer is the sense of wavering confidence that gives birth to questions like, Do I really have anything worth writing? Am I being presumptuous? Why do my words and ideas so often seem second-hand? Why would anybody want to read anything I write? Does the world really need more written words? I hear the voices of other writers. They are a choir whose voices fill the air, and my voice--a tiny murmur--cannot be heard.

*

For a long time I perceived my role in the writing classroom as the bearer of the red pencil hunting for incomplete sentences and mixed figures of speech and dangling modifiers and faulty parallelism. And that is sad because students are intimidated by the red pencil of judgment hanging like the sword of Damocles over their heads, and few ever know the wonder and power and adventure of writing to know themselves and others and the world.

*

As a writer I view myself as an apprentice. For years and years I have been practising--writing drafts, submitting writing for evaluation by teachers and editors and contest judges, stuffing file folders with reflective observations, embryonic poems and stories, memorable words and phrases, button-holing family and friends to read my writing, accepting all invitations to read my poetry, joining writing circles, displaying with pride my few publications, hiding with shame the sheaf of rejection slips, enrolling in creative writing courses with two of Canada's most distinguished writers.

What am I practising for? When does the apprentice become a craftsperson? Who determines my suitability or unsuitability for membership in the guild of writers? I recall the afternoon when I was confronted by a smiling woman who asked, Are you the poet Carl Leggo? I think it was the first time anyone had called me a poet. The smiling woman invited me to participate in my first poetry reading. I felt like Lana Turner being discovered in Schwab's drugstore. I was awarded a title by that smiling woman, a title I wear proudly, a title that sustains me through rejection and loss of confidence.

*

As an English teacher I taught my students to write in prescribed ways so that their writing read like the writing of everybody else. I encouraged (even compelled) them to murder their own voices and conceal their own personalities. I wanted none of that witty, sarcastic, punning, self-centered preoccupation that enlivened their conversation.

*

(January 18, 1988) My story "Sailing in a Concrete Boat" was discussed in writing class tonight, and as I predicted the story sailed no better than the concrete boat. Perhaps I just can't handle criticism. Perhaps I just can't stand criticism that is not adequately tempered with praise or that is unjust or that is brutal without mercy. The trustworthy critic is surely the critic who cares about the object of the criticism. My story--a story I invested a great deal of effort in as well as a great deal of emotion--was shredded with the condemnation that it was a ponderously slow narrative and a loose story with a wasted opening and unnecessary episodes and ineffective dialogue. I was especially upset because most of the criticisms were levelled at the qualities of the story that I had consciously worked hard to develop. The problem seems to be that my readers (including the professor) have a view of the short story which is simply too narrow. Therefore, they castigate any effort that does not fit their iron-clad perspective.

*

If my grade eleven English teacher had understood writing as participation in a discourse community, as convening the multiple voices that comprise that community, as seeking intertextual connections and resemanticizing the texts of others, as dynamically engaging the universe of textuality, perhaps she would have been more reluctant to pass me back a fiction assignment with the proclamation, "Carl, you will never be a writer." For too long writing has been regarded as the product of genius, inspiration, authenticity, creativity, and originality, the preserve of a privileged few who have inherited, genetically or culturally, gifts for effective language use.

*

(January 22, 1988) Worked all day on the new story about a fish plant worker who wants to form a union. I'm paying close attention to details of description and dialect. I keep hearing the voices which responded to my last story, and my confidence ebbs and flows. I have the fatalistic attitude that this story will be similarly criticized, and I don't even have it written yet.

*

Confronted with the blank page which in fact is not blank but is scribbled and scratched from top to bottom, I do not need to be unnerved by "the anxiety of influence" nor by the fear that I have nothing new to write nor by the lack of confidence that I can add nothing worthwhile to a textual field sprouting with eye-catching arrangements because to insert a text into the textual field is to acknowledge that the field is in constant flux, is indeed not a field at all, but a river, or better still, an ocean.

*

Without a sense of humour I could spend my life solidly ensconced in the conviction that truth is finally, irrevocably, eternally known, could spend my life vociferously, stridently, clamourously defending that truth, could spend my life like the Labrador retriever I once knew who trotted around the neighbourhood each morning, occasionally stopping to lift a leg and urinate on fence posts, thereby reasserting his claim to the territory.

*

(January 30, 1988) I have decided to write the new story with a post-modern flavour. I am incorporating quotations from historical sources into the narrative, thereby decentering the reader, never allowing her to feel comfortable with the structure, compelling her to ask, What's going on here?, demanding an imaginative and productive reading on several levels. Of course I know I am courting a loud cry of rejection. I must be masochistic or foolish or filled with hope.

*

As a writer I am no mimic trying to impersonate the voices of others with clever accuracy; awash in a sea of textuality I am being written while seeking to control the experience of being written by writing myself.

*

For many years as a student in school and university, I wrote with neurotic attention to the conventions of composition handbooks, endlessly afraid of the teacher's red pencil. I was zealously committed to Themewriting or Antiwriting or Prattling Texts--a prose that does not call attention to itself, a prose that is standardized and homogenized, a prose that is a copy of some hypothetical ideal model that students are expected to strive after.

*

I want a brazen quality in my writing compounded of didacticism and moral fervour and rhetorical posing, the kind of writing that can seduce the unwary reader or challenge the reflective reader, that can lead the reader down a path she doesn't even know she is walking or invite her to walk a path that goes in many different directions, a veritable adventure of journeying.

*

The political nature of all language use must be trumpeted loudly and clearly. To use language is to participate in a communal activity (all language being a system of signs culturally generated and conventionally defined) and hence in a political activity.

*

(February 12, 1988) The new story "Damson Trees" was chopped and uprooted, stormed by ice and salt-laced winds, ingested by hungry caterpillars and grasshoppers. The post-modern elements were vilified as stupid, unnecessary, conceited, and disruptive. I was soundly put in my place. The room was filled with the loud voice of my grade eleven English teacher, Carl, you'll never be a writer.

*

Words are like a beautiful woman who tantalizes me with quick smiles from one window and then another and still another in her impregnable castle while I stand below the walls watching and yearning and calling and hoping that sooner or later, one day at least, I will know words in their sincerity, energy, strength, in their life-changing, life-enhancing, empowering truth. Perhaps I should begin to scale the walls of the castle. Perhaps I am already scaling the walls of the castle.

GOODNEWSBADGOODNEWSBADGOODNEWSBADGOODNEWSBADGOODNEWSBAD

Sorry to have taken so long to reply. We're overstocked
We are pleased to accept your poems for publication in
with poems and are not taking anything until next year.
a future issue. I am pleased to inform you that your
We've read your material carefully but don't find it
submissions have been accepted for publication. I think
meets our needs at this time. I'm writing to inform you
I shall publish your poem because it's funny and fairly
that I've decided not to publish your manuscript. Sorry
clever and shaped and decadent in a way, and because
to have to say no. Rejection slips aren't much fun. But
your name is similar to mine. We would like to publish
do try us again. We return your manuscript in hopes it
your poem. Welcome aboard. You have done an excellent
will find a market elsewhere. The enclosed writing does
job. Our readers can benefit from these articles. You
not fit our current needs. However, please do continue
definitely are a writer. Thank you for letting us see
submitting. We appreciate your interest. I'm sorry that
your poems. With difficulty, we chose the following for
after such a long delay the news is bad. Thank you for
publication in our forthcoming issue. We are interested
letting me see your work. I suggest that in the future
in three of your poems and hope that you will agree to
you include your name and address at the top of every
the revisions proposed by our editors. Please respond
sheet. A big hello from another Newfoundlander in the
by December 6. Loved the poems. Send more. And thanks
West. Enjoyed the poems and would like more, but in a
especially for your very "visual" (particularly in the
less narrative and more poetic style. We hope your work
type-face department!) poems, each of which are already
will find a home elsewhere. We have decided that your
being photo-reduced and readied for publication. Thanks
manuscript is not in tune with our publishing needs. I
for getting in touch. Your manuscript will be published
regret to inform you that we cannot use your article,
in a future issue. Payment upon publication is twenty
but we hope that this response does not discourage your
dollars and two copies of the journal. Your essays are
submission of future manuscripts to us. Best of luck.
clearly written, topical, perceptive. Yours sincerely.

J: WHERE DO(ES) THE VOICE(S) COME FROM?

Julia Kristeva argues that "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another" (66). The writer is not sequestered in a sterile chamber where she produces her texts isolated from the texts of other writers. She is guided, constrained, and influenced by the norms and expectations, the models and discourse types of other writers. The notion of an autonomous individual expressing her self, her personality, her voice in a unique text fails to acknowledge the intertextual quality of all writing. As Barbara Johnson explains, "'intertextuality' designates the multitude of ways a text has of not being self-contained, of being traversed by otherness" ("Intertextuality" 264). Every text bears traces of other texts: citations, references, structural codes, allusions, phrases, images, generic conventions, themes.

Clearly this dissertation is a patchwork quilt of traces from many other texts. But even my poems and fiction are "traversed by otherness," intertextually connected to all the texts I've ever read or heard, all the texts ever written or spoken. I agree with James E. Porter that "the writer is simply a part of a discourse tradition, a member of a team, and a participant in a community of discourse that creates its own collective meaning" (35). Or, at least I mostly agree. Porter concludes that "the writer is simply a part of a discourse tradition." However, I don't think there is anything simple about being part of a discourse tradition. In writing this text I am intertextually related to Porter's text, but I am not only repeating Porter's text. I am retextualizing it by placing it in a new text and by modifying it. I am entering my voice into a discourse community where Porter's voice is already declaiming with vigour.

To understand writing as intertextual weaving is to expose the myth of the lone writer starving in her upper story garret as she struggles to forge her unique vision and voice. More productive is the conception of writers engaging in a common enterprise, borrowing from the vast library of Text, guided by the conventions and expectations of the discourse communities in which they participate, pushing against and modifying those conventions and expectations.

POLONIUS: THOUGH THIS BE MADNESS, YET THERE IS METHOD IN'T IT

Verily, Vera, the verdict,
though verbose,
is veridical.
With veritable, versatile verve
YOU verged near the
v
e
r
t
i
c
a
l
versant of verificative verity
VERY VERBOTEN!
u t l v r i i o s w t v r i o
n i e t g n u i h e t g
you verified the verbal version of
your vermiform vermiculate verjuice
versus
the verdant vernal verecund veronica.
For diverging from veracity and verisimilitude,
vermination and verdigris might be yours,
but the vergers (versed verbalists all)
C
O
N
V
E
R
G
E
D
and DECREEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEED
that henceforth Vera wear
a vermilion verucca
ON HER NOSE

K: WHERE DO(ES) THE VOICE(S) COME FROM?

James Britton proposes that "writing begins as written down speech" (Language 165). Writing is the transcription of "inner speech." Convinced that "the self . . . provides the unseen point from which all is viewed" (179), Britton proposes that (an) internal voice(s) in the core of self provide(s) the monologue (dialogue) that feeds writing ("Shaping" 144).

Like Britton, Walter Ong claims that "writing is always a kind of imitation talking" (Orality 102), "a representation of an utterance, of words that someone says or is imagined to say" (84).

Donald M. Murray also affirms Britton's conception of "inner voice":

> The act of voicing experience and connecting it involves, I think, fundamentally an aural facility. We record in written language what we say in our heads. This does not mean that writing is simply oral language written down. I believe we have a private speech we use when writing. When we know we may write, we silently practice expressing ourselves in our potential writing voices. Later we may record or revise in written language what sounded right when tried out in that silent voice within our minds. ("Process" 9)

Extending on Britton's conception of inner speech, James Moffett in "Liberating Inner Speech" claims that people are the victims of "mental arrestation" and "mental incarceration" (304-305). He recommends that a student needs ample opportunity for writing in order "to get going a continuity of thought that rides him or her right out beyond the confines of personal inner speech, to self-surprise" (308). For Moffett, "the self-incarcerated can liberate themselves if shown how they maintain the walls themselves" (308). The goal is "expansion toward wholeness" (308).

Like Moffett, Christine Mowat emphasizes the liberating activity of writing as the expression of inner speech. First, "the writer's inner voice is clear because she listens, plumbing the depths within herself, using the writing to reach further" (301). Then, the inner voice generates "a writing-up-from-within, a movement from self outwards" (306). For Mowat the inner voice is "associated with self-possession, self-determination and self-consciousness" (306).

Frank Smith complicates the common conception of inner speech which posits that meaning feeds thinking feeds speaking feeds writing:

> Even if we imagine we hear words in our head before we say or write them, we cannot say

> where those words come from. Their beginnings are lost in the recesses of the mind, in the brain behind the voices in the brain.
> (27-28)

The proposal that writing is transcribed inner speech can lead to notions of the individual writer as an autonomous self, original, gifted, and inspired, and to notions of writing as the spontaneous, natural revelation of that self. The writer is regarded as a well of sparkling water that needs to be drawn out or a geyser that periodically gushes forth.

These can be useful notions of writing informed and communicated by metaphors of inner speech, internal voices, written down speech, silent mental voices, self-incarceration, and liberating the self, but the conception of writing as the expression of a personal voice must recognize that any personal voice in writing is rhetorically inscribed and, at most, suggests a hint of the writer or one pose (like a photo). While the concept of voice suggests self-presence, it more accurately represents a stance, an entrance, a position of self-presence.

ALPHABET SOUP AND AN INVITATION TO WRITE (A) PERFECT POEM(S)

Margaret (A)twood

I've said the page is white, and it is: white as wedding dresses, rare whales, seagulls, angels, ice and death. Some say that like sunlight it contains all colours; others, that it's white because it's hot, it will burn out your optic nerves; that those who stare at the page too long go blind. (44)

Elizabeth (B)rewster

A few score of poems
a score of short stories
two novels
a bundle of diaries
scribblers full of dreams
some lecture notes
and committee minutes:

that's the total my life amounts to (31)

Anne (C)ampbell

I want to write   a poem
about bird wings   caves
dark fire things
the kind I like to read (36)

Louise (D)uprés

To give vent to a plural language that catches all the nuances of words beyond fixed definition, that abandons the order of the theological substantive, of ownership. A language of relations, of drift, alive with all our seedings. (36)

Marion (E)ast

A painful choice

To remain silent
And   sane
Or name
Your pain (16)

Judith (F)itzgerald

Each clean sheet, smudged,
dotted with I-burdened letters,
yields to an accumulated mass
of memory and history. (111)

Susan (G)lickman

That they met on a train has the authentic ring of a good symbol--to preserve the romance, they never say "subway." All poetry is translation. Even to herself she now says "train," and a little pulse of trochees starts throbbing choo choo choo choo at the base of her spine. (68)

Jean (H)illabold

It's not as if I were a man.
In that case, I might have become a Real Writer
with a girlfriend to feed me, wash my jeans
every so often, (um)
recharge my batteries,
edit my manuscripts, and of course
do the typing. (72)

Frances (I)tani

Creative writing prof reads my story aloud to class. All laugh at part about dream. Clearly, he says, this is the dream of a mad woman. All agree, even me. Don't tell that I dreamed it two nights before story due, no time to think up fiction this week. Only reality seems to knock at my door. (69)

Elizabeth (J)ones

O my fine line of graphite
   softest of minerals
      dark diamond
alive to electric currents
your tip records   probes
   drops on a plumb-line
      to strange depths
fishes in troubled waters. (102)

Smaro (K)ambourelí

Silence has been the original language assigned to woman by the patriarchal tradition. If any of you are tired of hearing women speaking as women, I will remind you of the obvious, that as a woman I have no other way of talking to you: either I speak as a woman or I remain silent as a woman. (52)

M. Travis (L)ane

Nothing is sure. A poem speaks
but with a mouth of weather.
Nothing's clear. (48)

Daphne (M)arlatt

the beginning: language, a living body we enter at birth, sustains and contains us. it does not stand in place of anything else, it does not replace the bodies around us. placental, our flat land, our sea, it is both place (where we are situated) and body (that contains us), that body of language we speak, our mothertongue. it bears us as we are born in it, into cognition. (Touch 45)

Sharon H. (N)elson

In these lands
the weavers use their hands
to spin poems, talismans
against gray winter.

Somewhere there
the women weave their words. (17-18)

Donna (O)'Sullivan

What do the texts tell us?
What, if anything, are we never told?
Why do we wait for words, evidence the
minds carefully inscribed there on that page
will not write, cannot imagine.
Why do we wait?
What are we waiting for? (17)

P. K. (P)age

With a poem I am given a phrase. Often when I least expect it. When my mind is on something else. And my hands busy. Yet it must be caught at once, for it comes like a boomerang riding a magical arc and, continuing its forward path, it will vanish unless intercepted. And that phrase contains the poem as a seed contains the plant. (185-186)

Judith (Q)uinlan

It is difficult, now, for me to describe the events that followed. Mostly, I think, because not much did happen. Most of the remarkable events of this most remarkable period of my life were intangible. Many things changed--in fact everything changed. But, as I try to look at it objectively, I see that not much happened. . . . Of course, the big difference was that I was in love. (98)

Jane (R)ule

Now that our sexual experience is increasingly available to us as a subject for contemplation, we have to extend our language to express our new consciousness until we have as many words for sexuality as the Eskimo has for snow, that pervasive, beautiful, and mortal climate in which we all live. (155)

Elizabeth (S)mart

What is art? Again and again this boring old mystery crops up. I know. I've heard the poem. I've felt the WORD. And above all I am aware of the inconvenient gift dropped in my lap. NOT to be ignored. A sacred duty is not too strong a way to put it. (183)

Polly (T)hompson

> Each poem is a construct against dissolution. When I feel all my body parts ready to fall away, I check the mirror to see I am all of a piece. Easier to make a salad, go to work or wash my hair, something that I have to do because I am my body and myself only, than let the voices take over--but sometimes I do let them, as a last resort. (160)

Jane (U)rquhart

My messages
            it seems
fall short of meaning
or are accidentally
mutilated
somewhere on the road
to destination (24)

Alice (V)an Wart

It is not magic
which makes me
tamper with words
transpose them
into sentences
with luck a poem (13)

Miriam (W)addington

Why did it take me
so long to find our
lost languages,
to learn our songs? (160)

Gail Fo(x)

He learned from woman, man is always
taught by woman's power: mother,
sister, wife or aunt, grandmother,
daughter, or lover. (83)

Patricia (Y)oung

I wrote because I had to,
to rid myself of the awful sadness:
that's the story people read.

If I had to do it all over,
I guess I'd say no
to that.

I'd rather have been happy
than a writer. (15)

Susan (Z)immerman

Consider the selfishness of poets
their ruthless naming of lovers
the way they tell the truth
(when it's painful)
or twist the truth
(when it's not, to make it so). (n.p.)

L: WHERE DO(ES) THE VOICE(S) COME FROM?

Elaine Showalter proclaims that feminist criticism "must find its own subject, its own system, its own theory, and its own voice" (247). For Monique Wittig, "that there is no 'feminine writing' must be said at the outset" ("View" 63). Her objection is that "the words 'writing' and 'feminine' are combined in order to designate a sort of biological production peculiar to 'Woman,' a secretion natural to 'Woman'" (63). Therefore, "'feminine writing' amounts to saying that women do not belong to history, and that writing is not a material production" (63).

Ann Rosalind Jones shares Wittig's concern:

> We need to ask not how Woman is different from Man . . . . We need to know how women have come to be who they are through history, which is the history of their oppression by men and male-designed institutions. (369)

Jones asks: "How can one libidinal voice--or the two vulval lips so startlingly presented by [Luce] Irigaray--speak for all women?" (369) Jones recommends:

> We are more likely to write, and to read each other's writing, if we begin by working against the concrete difficulties and the prejudices surrounding women's writing than

> if we simplify and idealize the process by locating writing as a spontaneous outpouring from the body. (373)

Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar have been instrumental in exploding "the prejudices surrounding women's writing." They ask:

> Is it possible . . . that the idea that language is in its essence or nature patriarchal is a reaction-formation against the linguistic (as well as the biological) primacy of the mother? (536)

They then propose:

> If the primary moment of symbolization occurs when the child identifies difference with distance from the mother, it is not only the presence of the mother's words that teaches the child words, but also the absence of the mother's flesh that requires the child to acquire words. (536)

Therefore, they observe:

> We must . . . ask whether the whole structure of "hierarchized" oppositions that some of us have thought essentially patriarchal has been historically erected as a massive defense against the deep throat of the mother and the

> astonishing autonomy of that mother tongue which is common to both genders. (538)

Then they conclude:

> For at last, in spite of feminist doubt and masculinist dread, we can affirm that woman has not been sentenced to transcribe male penmanship; rather, she commands sentences which inscribe her own powerful character. (539)

Is language patriarchal and phallocentric? Did Adam, the first man, the first namer, the first writer, guarantee that woman's role in language would be inferior, a supplement only, difference, a role of affirmation and confirmation, never creation? If Gilbert and Gubar are correct, the priority of patriarchal language is a myth, ideologically constituted, as all myths are, in order to privilege one half of the earth's population, the male half, ever since Adam, constantly afraid of being found out, filled with fear that the illusion supporting the power of the Wizard of Oz will one day be exposed in its mechanical manipulation and pusillanimous perpetuation. What will be the effects of disclosing men's inordinately amplified voices and fostering women's historically constrained voices? At least a revolution.

ZEBRARBEZ

  Adam's game
  was to name
a horse
  with stripes
zebra not arbez
a horse
  with a neck
giraffe not effarig
a horse
  with big ears
donkey not yeknod
a horse
  with antlers
moose not esoom,
soome, mesoo, osemo,
or horse

so? big deal!
naming the unnamed
is playing only
with a litter of letters
       lettered litter
Adam's naming
no spitting image
more spitting in the wind

but there is a sequel
penned though panned
by man who fools
himself with the myth
that he pins the world
  in place:

Eve not caring
for arbitrary naming
wanted to know
good and evil
poles of an axis
universe turning
taught Adam to know
taught Adam to name
with purpose,
Eve spelled
front or back
is still living
mother of all living

and Joseph, Adam's
distant cousin,
wise with silence
remembered Adam's
whole story
understood Mary
bore in her tomb-
like womb
her dark cherry
center new life
rising promise
of blossom
  the first
  and final
  WORD
  knowing
good and evil

and named
the angel-
given son
with an angel-
given name
stood outside
the play
and pondered
all these things
in his heart

NOTING/NEGATING/NEGOTIATING VOICES

Introduction

What are the voices I hear/respond to/converse with when I am writing poetry? In order to examine this question, I wrote several poems and recorded my interaction with voices during the process of writing. In one of my favorite Norman Rockwell drawings Norman Rockwell is drawing Norman Rockwell drawing as Norman Rockwell squints in a mirror at Norman Rockwell drawing. With a similar playful earnestness I scrutinized my writing and the voice(s) which operate(s) in it.

At first I planned to concentrate on a single poem, but then decided to write a suite of poems instead, partly because I was concerned that one poem would seem too facile, too slight, a bonbon to be chewed quickly, taste a momentary pleasure only, insignificant, but also because several poems are like photographs in an album, framed, separate, unique as well as connected, frames in a sequence, plural. In my writing process I hear insistent voices of criticism complaining/warning that it is not sufficient to write about ordinary people with ordinary emotions in ordinary situations. Needed is either an extraordinary subject or an extraordinary perspective on the ordinary. By working on a suite of poems, working with a larger canvas, a longer sheet of paper, my hope was to still some of those critical voices.

Some of the poems in the suite began with a remembered image or word which in turn triggered a free-writing exercise. I often like to get a block of words on the white page. I then have something concrete to react to, to question, to listen to, to expand and compress, to shape and sculpt. When I have words on paper there is the sense of a dialogue between me and the words. The words have their own voices. I read and reread the words. I speak the words in different vocal arrangements. I listen to the words, in both the silent and the oral readings. There is no clear direction provided by the words. They do not address me, Well, Carl, we think that you ought to employ our cousin Zeb and put some zip into the fourth line. But there is a sense in which the words speak to me and I respond, a growing conviction that one word is more effective than another, a surer confidence that decisions about lineation and structure are not only arbitrary but meaningful, or at least meaningful in their arbitrariness or arbitrary in their meaningfulness.

As I engaged in this self-reflexive investigation of my writing process, I was also impressed by how significantly important time is in the process. Much of my writing is waiting, sitting and waiting for something to happen. And the waiting is not like waiting for a bus which almost invariably arrives on time. I wait and I don't know how long I will need to wait, or even if the waiting will be rewarded. But the waiting is never in silence because voices are abuzz all around me--remembered voices, biographical voices, editorial voices, doubting voices, traces of every voice I've ever heard or read or spoken or written.

The title for the suite of poems, "Stories I Might Have Told You If We'd Had the Time to Sit on the Verandah on August Afternoons," is a title that came to me, that I heard, that tickled my fancy while riding the bus to a class. It's the kind of title I like--provocative and evocative, whimsical, wistful, witty. A title is an invitation and an intimation. I especially like an intimate invitation which establishes with the reader a friendly relationship, a collegial conversation.

POEM A
POTATOES

And my father met Cyril
outside the Caribou Tavern,
Sorry, Cyril, to hear about the old man.
Cyril's eyes blue like the bottle caps
on Blue Star beer smiled
at my father not smiling
(it's not every day a man dies).
Yes, Skipper, he's gone, gone for good
and you know, he left a whole sack
of potatoes and nobody to eat them.

How to begin? There is no image, no smell, no word, no voice, or more specifically none that demands attention as paramount--noisy din, cacophony, collage, amorphous shapeless field. Where to begin? Better to plunge!

As I write I remember my father telling me the story of meeting Cyril. I remember Cyril, too, and as strange as his response seems--irony? parody? idiosyncrasy?--I can hear Cyril's words. And I'm reminded of how readily I expect people to behave in a prescribed way in the face of death. I'm reminded of how quickly I presuppose reponses. I'm reminded of how frequently I am surprised when my expectations and presuppositions are contravened. I'm reminded of how circumscribed is what I know, see, hear, speak, write, how demarcated and divided and made possible, by my expectations and presuppositions.

Have I recorded a conversation between two men or reconstructed a conversation or invented a conversation?

I cut a line after line seven ("and smiling is hardly appropriate") because an internal editorial voice warns: Don't be moralistic. And the internal editorial voice is really the voice of the editor of an Ontario journal who recently accepted a poem for publication but wanted the last line chopped. He wrote that he thinks too many last lines are moralistic. I wrote him that I thought the last line was whimsical and that I now realize that moralism and whimsy are essentially the same. I also wrote that he could chop the last line, he could chop any line he didn't like. I don't care, I wrote. But I do care. I don't want the last line cut, but more than preserving the poem with the last line, inviolable to cuts, I want to publish the poem, and if publishing means chopping the last line, I'll chop the last line, and what I heard as whimsy remains labelled (for one reader at least) moralism. And now, as I write another poem that editor--almost a stranger, I know only that he is middle-aged and a poet--stands over my shoulder and whispers warnings about moralism, sufficiently loudly that I chop a line in the draft of this new poem.

I also change "bag" to "sack" in the second last line. I don't recall what word my father used when telling the story. Bag is now the more commonly used term, but Cyril, I think, would have used sack--the term used when potatoes were bought in fifty-pound jute sacks. My playing with the choice of "bag" or "sack" is motivated by a desire to create an authentic voice. But how can I hope to create an authentic voice? I haven't heard Cyril since I was a boy; I have no memory of his speaking voice. And if I did, how would I transcribe it or re-present it or actualize it on paper? What accent, what tone, what face and body expressions complemented the words? I don't know and I can't know. My quest for authenticity is in vain because undiscoverable.

It's not only Cyril's voice I cannot know. My father's voice telling the story several months ago is also forgotten. I recall only the line about the sack of potatoes. But my father is a fine story-teller, with a sense of timing, of pacing, of humor, of mimicry. I can hear his story-telling voice and I want it to inform the poem, but the poem has little of his voice. As I read it I hear his voice, but as others read it, how can they be expected to hear his voice? Instead, will they hear the voices of story-tellers they know? Will they hear any voices at all?

As I write and rewrite the poem, a chorus of voices is heard--Cyril's, my father's, the Ontario editor's. And especially the narrator's voice. This narratorial voice is one often heard in my poems--whimsical, sardonic, distant, puzzled. At least that is the way I hear the voice, but I am intimately related to the voice and perhaps I hear it the way I do only because I bring much background experience to hearing the voice.

How to continue? First, how to begin is unknown. Then the words come, slowly and quickly, flowing and stuttering, and then only a trickle. How to continue? A sense that continuing is important, that awash in an ocean of textuality I could drown if I don't at least tread water.

Now come the harsh voices: You've just wasted the morning writing drivel. Your words are as welcome as moose droppings. Who needs them? Wouldn't you prefer to be hiking near the Atlantic Ocean? There are more important subjects to write about than a man who spends too much time playing darts in a tavern and can't even express an appropriate sentiment about his father's death. There is love and hate and war and immortality and God and disaster. Of course you have written about death--that's a big subject, but is it big in your poem? Everything seems so little in your poem, debased, reduced, rendered insignificant.

How to end? The nagging, relentlessly prodding voices: Always wanting to give up. See Carl run. See Carl run. For a mile or two. See Carl give up. See Carl give up before the finish line. Always wanting another cup of coffee. Always wanting to close off, to grow silent again, to pretend that you've written what you wanted to write. How many words did you need? Count your words, one by one, thank the heavenly muse for every one. Your problem is that you can't sit still long enough. Why don't you rush to the word processor right now and punch in these pages of piddling pooh, print them perfectly, and praise plentifully. Sure, recall the advice that a poem is never finished, only abandoned, and abandon this one.

How to continue? During the entire process of writing the poem I hear the voices of the curmudgeons in the balcony: Why is the poem so simple, so straightforward? Why doesn't he experiment more? Reader's Digest would probably print this maudlin sentiment. And my reply to the curmudgeons: Stuff it, mumbled under my breath, but offered with a smile, Thank you for your advice.

POEM E
A COFFIN AND A CHEVY

My father bought the '53 Chevy
(maroon and new), drove my brother and me
out of the city along the Trans Canada Highway
to cut a Christmas tree, parked on the shoulder,
left my brother and me, sank into the snow
like quicksand (my brother, only four, laughing)
before he was swallowed by the trees like darkness
and I was laughing at my brother laughing
and my father waved a hand, his mouth a tight line
and my brother jumped up and down in the back seat
while I pretended to drive away (for help)
but went nowhere and my father didn't come back,
my brother full of fear, no longer laughing,
and the air was thick with chewy toffee,
my father gone, my brother going crazy,
so I grabbed the ice scraper and jabbed holes
in the maroon velvet over me like the inside
of a coffin, no escape, and my father returned,
creature from the snow lagoon, bearing a tree,
a wide grin where the line had been,
and the car was a car, not a coffin,
my father was alive, my brother was laughing,
and my father looked at the neat triangular flags
hanging from the ceiling of his new Chevy,
said nothing, drove back to the city
in a Chevy once more a coffin.

This morning I've drunk too much coffee. The telephone rang--a wrong number. The mailman brought another bill from the public library for overdue books. A lonely morning. I am growing tired of solitude. My mood is gray--a splendid mood for writing a poem. I once wrote a story that began: "On the morning after, I walked on the bluff above the harbour smooth like polished steel and the houses clinging to the rocky hills of Corner Brook were reflected in the still water and everywhere I looked my world was upside down and though not unfamiliar I felt only dizziness as I walked upright in an upside down world. Or was I upside down in an upright world?" In a writing class the story was criticized with scathing abandon, and I rewrote it and rewrote it until I was convinced that I wasn't improving it. So, I saved the first two sentences (which I still liked and which the writing teacher said he liked) and discarded the rest. Now I want to use those sentences in a poem. I also have a scrap of writing in my writing-in-process folder that reminds me of an incident I'd like to write about. The scrap is: "My father bought the '53 Chevy car, maroon and new, and drove my brother and me out of the city, along the Trans Canada Highway to cut a Christmas tree."

Instead of beginning with freewriting, I plan to use these two scraps of writing and to build around them a poem. When I ask, How can I combine these scraps?, I almost hear an audible voice proposing that the narrator's father is gravely ill, that the narrator is concerned about his father, that the narrator recounts the past and is filled with sadness and regret. It isn't too surprising that the narrator's mood mirrors my own this morning. But more significantly the suite of poems will likely acquire a stronger sense of connectedness with the addition of this poem. The suite of poems which is a series of stories will be framed by one overriding story--the narrator's relation with his father.

What surprises me most is the relative ease with which I am reclaiming scraps of writing and utilizing them in another context. I am obviously involved in decontextualizing and recontextualizing, but it seems a remarkably unsingular operation, in fact like the writing process as I typically know it. I am certainly not hearing a spontaneous, inspiring voice telling me what to write. Even as I write, I am feeling the effects of my gray mood dissipating, to be replaced by a mood of amusement, almost exhilaration. I am enthused with my sense of self-conscious discovery and control, self-consciously enthused. I am looking over my shoulder while I write about an I who I manipulate and/or who manipulates me. Mutual manipulation, interdependence, both speaking and spoken, both writing and written. My voice(s) are expressed/disclosed/manufactured/constrained/performed in language, and in language I hear voices (mine and not mine) expressed/disclosed/manufactured/constrained/performed.

But for all the tide of playfulness I enjoy as I listen to the voices of my evolving writing and my voice as I speak aloud to myself and inner voices that are rattling noisily in my thinking, I am still aware of a darker side. Over breakfast I had an unpleasant conversation with my son, and our voices--whining and reproachful--still fill the air, a stark reminder that a father-son relationship seldom operates smoothly. And those voices are like echoes of other voices that can still be heard across a few decades, my father's voice and my voice in hot arguments that eventually ceased in silence.

As I reflect on the writing of this poem, I am aware that I am writing out of self, out of personal experience, out of events and emotions that are important to me. What is the effect of the poem on me personally? Why do I feel emotional (almost a few tears)? I don't remember feeling much remorse about the incident--one of those stupid things that children invariably do. Perhaps there is something larger here. It seems that I want to say something to somebody. I want to be didactic. I want to act with decision and significance. I want to improve the world. At the same time I don't expect any success. Relations with my father, relations with my son, relations between fathers and sons will continue to be chaotic affairs, full of comedy and tragedy, and all the poems in the world will not change that. Yet I still insist on writing my poem--a kind of urinating in the wind with a shout amidst the din. For perhaps what remains most important is refusing to lapse into silence, an antechamber to invisibility and nonexistence.

But for all my gray mood leading to pontifical proclamations, I still draw back from some of the directions that I might pursue in the poem. My initial enthusiasm for framing the suite of poems with a narrative line in which the speaker's father is dying and the speaker is filled with regret and resolution to amend his past sins wanes. The poems in the suite are "Stories I Might Have Told You If We'd Had the Time to Sit on the Verandah on August Afternoons." I don't want to suffocate the voices of humour, eccentricity, and playfulness with a heavy-handed sentimentalism, with an easy appeal to sympathy. In the poem there is a quirky narratorial voice that invites readers to help evoke the story by recalling other similar incidents, incarnating the essence of the story with the flesh of other stories. So, I decide to delete the lines about the upside down world reflected in the harbour (I can always use the lines in some other poem) and to delete the dying father story. I also ignore all voices urging me to end the poem with a comment like "I want to tell him I'm sorry about the Chevy, but I won't." I even change the last lines from "said nothing, drove beside the Humber River/back to the city in silence like death" to "said nothing, drove back to the city/in a Chevy once more a coffin" in order to sustain the playful mood, in order to avoid the persistent inclination to pontification, in order to negate the sonorous voices preaching that a poem deals with "big" issues and deserves words/themes like silence and death.

In the process I learn anew that writing opens up spaces for voices to be voiced and that as an author I authorize some voices and do not authorize other voices.

POEM I
A WISE MAN BEARING GIFTS

Christmas Eve
Uncle Cam
(the seventh son of a seventh son
claimed he was blessed
with magical power
to spirit away warts
though I'd never seen him do it)

drunk (often was;
always was, my mother said)

stood in the doorway
his face round and red
like a Macintosh apple

bore a small box
with a big mauve bow

said, For Skipper
(a bottle of Avon
aftershave shaped
like a horse's head)

said, Skipper, I brought you
the 'arse's 'ead,
you're a good friend
(spit in a stutter)
but I kept
the 'arse's arse for myself

Christmas Eve
Uncle Cam
(the seventh son of a seventh son)
spirited away a lot of warts

Sitting in the HUB Mall. Eating a pasta salad and a wild cherry muffin from Incredible Edibles. Having trouble writing. My problem is simple. I'm feeling sorry for myself. Another publisher's rejection. A bunch of personal issues I'm sure nobody wants to hear about. All getting in the way.

But part of the fun of writing is writing through the hard times, learning to ignore the voices of complaint and self-pity, of rejection, of harping attacks on confidence, learning to write through the voices, off, in, around, in spite of, under, over, into, out of, beside the voices.

I set myself a task and I write. The process is workmanlike with commitment, resolve, objective. In effect I am voicing a commitment to put words on paper, to provide an arena where voice(s) can perform and be performed.

A memory. Vivid and sensual. Seen and heard. Years later. Uncle Cam now dead. A cantankerous, self-destructive man. A comical man, too.

I write freely, filling up a page with words, lots of words, pushing the pen, pausing only to push faster and harder.

Then I chop the words, cutting more and more. Surprising myself with the relentless cutting. I want the poem lean. With only half the words I started with, I still cut more words.

Later. I type the words. Unhappy with the length of the lines. More cutting. Shorter lines. A leaner look.

I am caught up with the voices of technique: What is the effect of cutting words, making the poem lean? What is the effect of parenthetical expressions, gaps, lineation, stanzaic structure? How do they contribute to voice? Does the stanzaic structure slow down the reading and help produce a reading experience that is like watching a slide show with stops and starts, with clearly framed pictures? Do parenthetical expressions slow down the reading? Do they add a whimsical, editorial, detached voice? How would a reader perform this poem orally? There is the narrator's voice. What is it like? Skeptical, informed, acutely aware of a dramatic moment, priggish, cool and distant, amused, a little moralistic? There is Uncle Cam's voice and the mother's voice. What are they like? What is the effect of repeating "said" three times? What is the effect of repeating the first lines at the end? What is the effect of minimal punctuation? How can I indicate the uniquely Newfoundland dialect in written language? The humour of the poem depends on the dialectal practice of dropped "h's." In an early draft I wrote: "I brought ye the 'arse's 'ead, Skipper, because you're/a gude frind, but I kep da 'arse's arse for meself." But the effort to intensify the effect of the dialect by changing the spelling of a lot of words actually diminishes the impact of the most significant phrases about the parts of the horse. So, I concentrate on the important phrases instead of trying to imitate on paper the complicated dialect of a Newfoundland speaker. What is the effect of the title with its intertextual connection to the biblical Magi? How does the folk wisdom that "the seventh son of a seventh son" has special powers contribute to the voice(s) of the poem? What are the cultural connotations of Avon aftershave lotion?

What motivates/guides/determines my questions and decisions about technique? Is there a voice of poetic genius residing in the gray mass of my brain dictating clear instructions with the assurance and wisdom of genius? Do I hear the voices of writers I have read, voices imbued with confidence from publishing and critical reviews and scholarly interest? Do I hear the voices born out of my previous writing, full of encouragement that I can trust the voices of my own judgment about what works and doesn't work?

POEM O
BUZZ

My father's best
friend Buzz
wanted to give
up working
in the mill and
become a dentist,
wanted it so
bad he couldn't
think about anything
else until he was
sure everybody
was plotting
against him
scheming to make
sure he could
never be
a rich dentist
and he smothered
his wife under
a pillow till
she wasn't breathing
and got sent
to the Waterford
where he's been
sitting in
a corner
reading
for the last
twelve years
and now
he's getting out
and my father
hopes
he doesn't
come to visit.

I like the colloquial voice, the matter-of-fact voice, the amoral voice, the straightforward voice.

I want a tone of breathlessness, an unfolding trail of words, one long sentence in short lines that end arbitrarily so that the reader is pushed on and on without pause. Then the period at the end punctuates the conclusion. Not only do the words cease spilling out, but the period is a sign which clearly announces the end, a wall to bang up against after tumbling through the words.

The poem was initiated in a free-writing exercise when I wrote a block of words with no attention to lineation or structure. Pleased with the effort, I rewrote the words in shorter lines, and then decided to rewrite it with even shorter lines. In some freewriting exercises I produce a block of words and then like a sculptor chop and chop away at the words until I am satisfied with the poem. For this poem the words came quickly and easily, and were like a lump of modeling clay to be shaped, extended, rolled, played with until I was satisfied with the shape.

Do my changes in the poem from block of words to a final version really achieve the effects of breathlessness I suggest? If so, how or why? What do my changes in lineation and structure do? Is it a convention that short lines signify a fast reading pace or a slow reading pace? I have chosen to end many lines after a modifier or a preposition or an auxiliary verb, thereby compelling the reader to rush on to the next line--a teleological momentum is generated.

Will other readers of the poem respond to lineation and punctuation and structure in the same way I respond? I doubt it. Does that mean, then, that other readers will hear (a) different voice(s) than I hear? Very likely. I hope so.

In the poem am I playing around with the tragic/catastrophic events of people's lives? The poem deals with insanity, murder, incarceration, broken relationships, fear, unfulfilled hopes. The words are impressed on the paper, flecks of carbon stamped by steel hammers. The words hint at a story (or stories), just a few stark details out of more than a decade of living for a family and a neighbourhood. The words are no more than an invitation to readers to write the stories, to incarnate the words in an activity of conjuring, constructing, producing, actualizing, visualizing, identifying, imagining.

I don't want to be perceived as a writer who belittles human tragedy and catastrophe; I don't want to be perceived as a writer who sensationalizes human tragedy and catastrophe. But do I have any control over the way readers respond to my writing? Some? Much? Not much? I suspect not much. When a reader conjures (a genius summoning a genie) a voice or a persona speaking the words of the poem, the reader is significantly responsible for the voice(s) she hears. The reader is guided by the text as a series of signs to make meaning, but the meaning-making, rather than textually prescribed, is idiosyncratic and unpredictable.

But in the same way that I acknowledge the reader's privilege and responsibility for unique productions in reading, I would like the reader to acknowledge the writer's privilege and responsibility for unique productions in writing. Instead of responding to a poem by interrogating the writer, Did you really say/think/do that?, or I can't believe you are that way, the reader could recognize the writer's distance/difference from her writing.

The poem is enigmatic, coy, promising and holding back, tantalizing, playing. Or is it?

Even though I like the voice(s) in the poem, I am still hesitant to call the poem finished. A critical voice insists that the language is too plain, too unembellished, too prosaic. And I respond to the voice(s) by reading and rereading the poem. But my efforts to make changes ("become a dentist" to "be a dentist"; "so bad he couldn't think about anything else" to "more than anything else"; "to give up working in the mill" to "stop working in the mill") do not quell the critical voice(s). After further readings I remain surprised that I still want to make changes in the poem, even though none of the changes I make are satisfying. Perhaps the poem is weak and not worth any further effort. Or perhaps I am conscience-ridden because the poem came too easily. Perhaps I hear a critical voice full of neurotic compulsion that I can't gain control over. Perhaps I need to live with the critical voice(s), using what is useful, ignoring what is not.

POEM U
SNAPSHOTS

on August 6 my father spoke
  two words only   hello
  dropped the phone
a still silent world exploded
charged through the door
   leaped the steps
      raced the field
         jumped the fence
barged into Mrs. Pollard's house
        was gone
I chased him and sat on a rock
in the August morning air
the world silent still once more
        waited
        a long time
the blue sky exploded
fell around my feet
the siren like shards of glass
the ambulance men, the stretcher
my father, Mrs. Pollard
her face white like a beachstone
red with lipstick or blood
my father looked at me
his mouth opened and closed
the word   dead   hung
in the air all day
     for many days

"Snapshots" evolved, not from free writing or a few scraps of writing or a few remembered words once spoken, but with an image, a neighbour carried out of her house, soon dead with a brain hemorrhage. It is relevant that in writing this poem which recounts a sad touchstone event in my personal life, a first encounter with death, I am occupied with technical questions of diction, structure, focalization, narrator's voice. Even though I am moved (at least emotionally titillated) to sympathetic concern as I write, the trenchant voices of structure, technique, verisimilitude, mimesis, logic burst into song around me, demanding my attention, and I admit I am fabricating much of the story.

I am making a story and in the making my attention is focused on the following questions: How should I structure the two words the father speaks? Should I use "receiver" or "phone"? What is the effect of staggering lines in order to represent the father's movement after the telephone call? Why do I prefer "the blue sky exploded" to "the blue sky was exploded"? Are "leaped," "raced," "jumped," "barged" the most effective verbs I can use? How does a person "race the field"? Why do I like expressions that do not strictly obey the conventions of grammar? Why do I provide the date? What is the effect of writing a few lines much shorter than the others? How is "Snapshots" intertextually related to the poetry of Newfoundland writers Al Pittmann and Tom Dawe? Why do I hear Pittmann reading in a loud voice full of pain and humour? Why am I convinced and pleased that Dawe would recognize his influence in my poem? What is the effect of stringing principal clauses together with the conjunction "and"? Why am I deleting most uses of the conjunctions "and" and "when"? Without conjunctions are the lines etched more sharply with firmer edges? How does the lack of conjunctions affect/effect the tone of the poem? With the deletion of conjunctions does the poem become imagistic, a series of pictures? Should I title the poem "Snapshot" or "Snapshots"? Why do I choose to rewrite the last lines so the dying neighbour is not carried out by the father? Why do I not want the father to appear too heroic? Because I am sticking to verisimilitude and the way I recalled the event or because the picture of the father carrying the dying woman would be a television cliché, a melodramatic ending inappropriate for the tone of the poem? Where do these kinds of questions come from? Where/when/how/why have I internalized voices that guide me in making decisions about questions like this? Who has helped me internalize these voices? Can these voices be identified? How much are these voices related to experience with writing, experience with reading, experiences with teachers and writers and readers and editors, whim, gut instinct, an intuitive sense of what works?

POEM Y
I STILL HEAR THE BELL RINGING

On long walks from Crescent Pond
in cool/warm Mays on the keen edge
of promised summer (our creels
heavy with a dozen trout more
than the law permitted) my father
offered the only advice I remember:

     Take your garbage home,
and in my knapsack, then and now,
empty Vienna sausage cans,
wax paper, pop bottles

     If you don't know a word,
     look it up in a dictionary,
strong advice, for now I know
many words and in words I am known

     Never hate anybody,
wisdom like an iron bell ringing
from a gray sky, its echoes
heard through the years

     Never hate anybody
          Never hate anybody
My one wish (who needs three?):
on long walks from Crescent Pond
through the dense spruce, across the bog
on a trail only my father could see,
I wish he had taught me how

Odd the way fragments of conversation can still be heard across the years, evoked/provoked by a smell or a sight triggering a memory, forgotten but stored for recovery. Since I spend an inordinate part of my days with words, reflecting on them, shaping them, listening to them, it isn't surprising that I am surprised by how few of my father's words I now know--a few jokes, a few stories about relatives, a few words of advice. Nor is it surprising that the few words of advice I recall have been invested with special significance: the rarer, the more valuable.

In writing some of my poems I wrestle with the critical voices that argue that the poems are too ordinary, too facile, too simple. In writing "I Still Hear the Bell Ringing" my concern is that I am too weighty, too didactic, too moralistic. But why do I fear being didactic? I am a teacher. All my life I have taught and been taught. Why do I think it inappropriate to be didactic in a poem? I hear (think I hear) the editorial voices of convention ringing warning bells about the need to suggest, not declare, to symbolize, not propagandize. Leave didacticism to religious poetry and left-wing politics.

Because of this concern I regard the second line in the fifth stanza as crucial: "My one wish (who needs three?)." The parenthetical expression full of whimsy defuses (at least a little) the serious tone and provides some respite from the moralistic ending. But generally I think the voice is pompous and priggish and pontificating. Will every reader regard the poem as didactic? Will every reader respond to didacticism with the sense of distaste I feel?

Otherwise, I quite like the poem, especially the first stanza, the vivid sensual images and the rhythm. I also like the way breaking the law concerning trout fishing quotas is juxtaposed with the three words of advice in which the Judeo-Christian ethic is expressed with succinct clarity.

Nevertheless, it is strange how a line or two can be like a rotten apple that spoils for me the enjoyment of the other parts of the poem. Strange how my attention is riveted to the question of the didactic voice. What voice(s) do you hear as you read/write the poem?

Continuing

During the writing of "Stories I Might Have Told You If We'd Had the Time to Sit on the Verandah on August Afternoons" I have been conversing with myself, listening to the evolving writing, responding to the voices I hear, taking notes on my ongoing dialogue with my writing, sparring with internal and external voices of criticism and judgment, convening the voices of other writers for a sing-song, courting the voices of memory, investigating how voice is constructed and influenced by the choice of diction, structure, and lineation, acknowledging how voices can be debilitating and empowering, confessing how growth in confidence as a writer (and perhaps as a person) depends on writing through the voices of negation, exploring the question of the source of voice, understanding how writing involves the transcription of voices, the manipulation of voices, the marriage of voices, the dissemination of voices, the quelling of voices, the nurturing of voices, the celebration of voices. And search(ing) (for) voice(s) continues.

A STORY IN THE STORY

easy to read
king of the hill   my brother   alone
a story as more
jumped from Mugs O'Reilly's house falling
than a chapter
three stories up to his waist in snow
in the story
drove a purple Raleigh one-speed straight
to revel in the self-
up Hospital Hill in a perpendicular line
contained whole
surfed Lynch's Lane on a sled, all the way
of one story only
from Old Man Downey's to Maggie Mercer's.
a fragment
but perhaps I'm only bragging, not recalling
jagged   broken
my brother wasn't always a king, reluctant
of a whole story
to write all his story, the night chapters,
hidden in the traces
the gaps between the chapters, my brother
of artifacts
the king   at least   a story in the story

M: WHERE DO(ES) THE VOICE(S) COME FROM?

Roland Barthes opposes the notion of the author as the origin of a text. Instead he describes a text as a weaving or braid of codes or voices of discourse communities:

> The grouping of codes, as they enter into the work, into the movement of the reading, constitute a braid (_text_, _fabric_, _braid_: the same thing); each thread, each code, is a voice; these braided-or-braiding-voices form the writing. (_S/Z_ 160)

Barthes's object is to diminish the conception of the writer as an autonomous individual or creative genius who forges a new path in her words. According to Barthes language is universally pervasive like the atmosphere into which humans are born. "Our civilization . . . is a civilization of words" (_Grain_ 31), and "everything is language, nothing escapes language, all of society is permeated by language" (_Grain_ 153). Out of this conviction Barthes reconceptualizes the reading/writing connection. He highlights the reader's role in the production of plural responses to a text. The reader is not a consumer, but a producer (_S/Z_ 4-6). In some of his writings Barthes seems to usurp the writer's throne in order to coronate the reader, but he refutes this charge by arguing that both writer and reader are governed by the codes that structure language use:

> The most subjective reading imaginable is never anything but a game played according to certain rules. Where do these rules come from? . . . These rules come from an age-old logic of narrative, from a symbolic form which constitutes us even before we are born--in a word, from that vast cultural space through which our person (whether author or reader) is only one passage. (*Rustle* 31)

In his efforts to emphasize the role of the reader as a producer, not a consumer, and to proclaim the ways in which readers and writers are directed by the codes or voices of the already-written, Barthes declares the "death of the author" (*Rustle* 49):

> We know now that a text consists not of a line of words, releasing a single "theological" meaning (the "message" of the Author-God), but of a multi-dimensional space in which are married and contested several writings, none of which is original: the text is a fabric of quotations, resulting from a thousand sources of culture. (*Rustle* 53)

With the proclamation of the author's death, Barthes also declares the birth of the reader:

> Here we discern the total being of writing: a text consists of multiple writings, proceeding from several cultures and entering into dialogue, into parody, into contestation; but there is a site where this multiplicity is collected, and this site is not the author, as has hitherto been claimed, but the reader: the reader is the very space in which are inscribed, without any of them being lost, all the citations out of which a writing is made; the unity of a text is not in its origin but in its destination, but this destination can no longer be personal: the reader is a man without history, without biography, without psychology; he is only that *someone* who holds collected into one and the same field all of the traces from which writing is constituted. (*Rustle* 54)

Barthes objects to the common reading practice which assumes that an author's voice can be discerned in her writing (*Rustle* 50). He argues instead that what we hear is the voice which

> the reader lends, by proxy, to the discourse:

> the discourse is speaking according to the reader's interests. Whereby we see that writing is not the communication of a message which starts from the author and proceeds to the reader; it is specifically the voice of reading itself: in the text, only the reader speaks. (S/Z 151)

While I applaud Barthes' reconceptualization of the reader/writer relationship, I still ask: Does the author have to be killed in order to give birth to the reader? Barthes objects to the author "making his person the subject, the impulse, the origin, the authority, the Father, whence his work would proceed, by a channel of expression" (S/Z 211). I agree with Barthes. Once a text enters the arena of discourse, the author becomes one more reader. The author does not hold an exclusive privilege of understanding. She does not possess a touchstone by which all readings/writings can be judged and evaluated. The text becomes a site of language where readers can revel in the explosion and dissemination of plural interpretations.

But is the author only "a public scribe, a notary institutionally responsible" for registering the reader's dictation as she responds to the text out of the operative codes? (S/Z 152) Doesn't the author retain an originary investment in the text in the sense that the text as a discursive site has been initiated and constructed by the author? While the author has struggled to weave the voices, the codes of culture, while the author has been enmeshed in the network of textuality, trapped in the web of voices, hasn't she also acted upon that network and produced that which is both old and new? And like all readers does she not continue to be engaged in the production of reading?

I especially like Maurice Blanchot's summary of the relationship between the author and the reader:

> Author and reader are equals with respect to the work and in it. Both are unique. Neither has any existence except through this work and based upon it . . . . The reader is no less "unique" than the author. For he as well is the one who, each time, speaks the poem as if afresh, not as an echo of the already spoken and already understood. (Space 227)

ANATOMY OF VOICE

LARYNX

organ of voice

ligaments

capsular
thyro-hyoid
crico-thyroid
crico-tracheal
hyo-epiglottic
thyro-epiglottic
glosso-epiglottidean
posterior crico-arytenoid

muscles

aryteno-epiglottideus inferior
aryteno-epiglottideus superior
crico-arytenoideus lateralis
crico-arytenoideus posticus
thyro-epiglottideus
thyro-arytenoideus

cartilages

cornicula laryngis
epiglottis
cuneiform
arytenoid
cricoid
thyroid

N: WHERE DO(ES) THE VOICE(S) COME FROM?

In her prose poem "hidden ground" Daphne Marlatt writes about "that tongue our bodies utter, woman tongue, speaking in and of and for each other" (Touch 27). Marlatt equates textuality and anatomy. In a similar way Betsy Warland writes in "serpent(w)rite, turn four" about "our bodies where word begins," and in a gnomic line observes that "word is body text is tissue" (15). A woman's writing has its source in female biology and nature and is uttered/outered from her body.

Hélène Cixous has been instrumental in linking physiology and woman's writing:

> Oral drive, anal drive, vocal drive--all these drives are our strengths, and among them is the gestation drive--just like the desire to write: a desire to live self from within, a desire for the swollen belly, for language, for blood. (891)

Cixous warns, "Censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time" (880). She enjoins, "Write your self. Your body must be heard" (880). According to Cixous a woman is "spacious, singing flesh" (889). Therefore, she declares:

> A woman's body, with its thousand and one

> thresholds of ardor--once, by smashing yokes and censors, she lets it articulate the profusion of meanings that run through it in every direction--will make the old single-grooved mother tongue reverberate with more than one language. (885)

As a man I often feel excluded from the feminist perspective that unites the body and writing. I cannot, for example, write in white ink as Cixous proposes woman does (881). I apparently lack the multiple erogenous zones like sensual lips that traverse a woman's body, and must be satisfied with a single localized zone that has been invested with undeserved significance in order to compensate for its relative lack. I have little to do with birth. Still I am caught up in the transforming fervour of new ideas. I am reminded that writing is caught up in bodily processes. I reflect on the often intense emotions, the acute sensations, the exhilaration, the exhaustion, that accompany the act of writing.

But how inherently and integrally is the body connected to writing? Are metaphors of writing as giving voice to bodily pulsions and energies, or ingestion, digestion, excretion, or giving birth, or pulling teeth, or surgical removal, or penning penis, or voluble vulva lips, still more figurative ways of conceptualizing and framing the writing process, or do they acknowledge a biological connection between the body and writing that has been censured for millennia and now demands celebration?

PIRATE'S TREASURE

      Dale's father
(small and dark like Errol Flynn)
sometimes sold men's shirts
door to door
      on the Great Northern Peninsula
            from Bonne Bay to Griquet
but mostly dressed in pale pink shirts
      and mornings
paraded down Lynch's Lane
      and Old Humber Road
            to the Caribou Tavern
      and afternoons
visited Mrs. Birch (tea, Dale said)
until one blue afternoon
Mr. Birch (uninvited)
      joined Dale's father
            at tea with Mrs. Birch
and the hill was a bonfire with curses
when Mr. Birch
      thrust Dale's father
(bare feet, gray pants, no pink shirt)
high above his head
      and twirled him round
            and round
like a helicopter
        ready to fly
(Dale's father was no Errol Flynn)
and sparks of silver
      change flew
and Cec and Macky
      and Frazer and I
looted a pirate's treasure
of nickels, dimes, quarters
and bought hard candy
      (three for a cent), bags full,
            sucked all day
and still had some left
      for tomorrow

P: WHERE DO(ES) THE VOICE(S) COME FROM?

In Narrative Discourse Gérard Genette meticulously differentiates between voice and mood. He proposes that mood refers to "who is the character whose point of view orients the narrative perspective?" or "who sees?" (186) Voice, on the other hand, refers to "who is the narrator?" or "who speaks?" (186) Genette thinks this distinction is an "apparently obvious but almost universally disregarded distinction" (186).

In a related way Seymour Chatman distinguishes between point of view and narrative voice:

> Point of view is the physical place or ideological situation or practical life-orientation to which narrative events stand in relation. Voice, on the contrary, refers to the speech or other overt means through which events and existents are communicated to the audience. (153)

For Chatman an important question is how the illusion of presence is achieved in the interaction with a text:

> By what convention does a spectator or reader accept the idea that it is "as if" he were personally on the scene, though he comes to it by sitting in a chair in a theater or by turning pages and reading words? (147)

This illusion of presence, suggests Chatman, is produced by the concept of the narrator's voice (147). Chatman argues that voice is always an element of discourse, a rhetorical device or effect, a textual stance (154), the way as differentiated from the what or story or narrative (9).

To advise writers, Write in your own voice, is to limit the concept of voice. The question the writer needs to ask is, Who speaks? But the speaker can occupy one (or several) of many positions. Instead of advising writers, Write in your own voice, more productive advice is: Play with voices. Freely explore the consequences of different narrators. Don't be enslaved to verisimilitude or mimesis or convention. Don't be sure that there is a way to tell a story or argue a thesis or communicate a moral or evoke an emotion. Language is game or play. To use language is to be caught up in discourse, in rhetoric, in the materiality of language, in a verbal performance, in a verbally wrought illusion or reality-effect, in producing and disclosing and constructing the world.

SILENT SONG

when Orpheus, with his lyre, sang, even beasts, trees, rocks listened, and when Orpheus seeking Eurydice descended into the silent abyss to fill the darkness with song, even Pluto, god at the earth's center, wept and changed his mind: go, she will follow, just don't look back, but Orpheus on the long journey could not bear the silence, turned only to see Eurydice fade, heard no farewell, spent days pining on the edge of the abyss, but his song no longer broke the earth's rock, and Orpheus sang without ceasing until women inflamed by his single love for Eurydice, with cries of fire and ice, ripped out his tongue and arms, and forever faraway Orpheus gazes on Eurydice with a silent song

SILENCE

What is silence?

Not the mere absence of utterance.

Ringing with its own voice(s), gaps and fissures and pauses dividing discourse, open spaces for making meaning, active performance, revelation and concealment, signifier of disseminating significance.

The comedian Red Skeleton (holding up a white canvas): "What do you see?" Nothing, of course. "This, folks, is a picture of a ghost milking a white cow in a snowstorm." Of course.

*

> Rather than being that which thwarts language, silence is that which opens the way for language's potency . . . . Speech is born from silence and seeks its conclusion in silence. (Dauenhauer 119)

*

Why are some letters written and not pronounced: silent letters? How can letters be silent?

*

> My students . . . talk a lot about silence: about what kinds of silence there are: the voices inside you that tell you to be quiet, the voices outside you that drown you out or

> politely dismiss what you say or do not understand you, the silence inside you that avoids saying anything important even to yourself, internal and external forms of censorship, and the stress that it produces. (Annas 4)

*

Silence is the unarticulated, the unspoken, the unwritten that cannot be articulated, spoken, written.

Silence is the failure, the unwillingness to hear.

Silence is both a verb and a noun, a subject and a predicate, a sentence complete in its ideational oneness (silence silences; silences silence).

*

> The dumb silence of apathy, the sober silence of solemnity, the fertile silence of awareness, the active silence of perception, the baffled silence of confusion, the uneasy silence of impasse, the muzzled silence of outrage, the expectant silence of waiting, the reproachful silence of censure, the tacit silence of approval, the vituperative silence of accusation, the eloquent silence of awe, the unnerving silence of menace, the peaceful silence of communion, and the irrevocable

> silence of death illustrate by their unspoken response to speech that experiences exist for which we lack the word. (Kane 14-15)

But do we really lack the word? Is silence not the word? Are not all experiences known in words? Is silence not a sufficient word?

*

I can learn from silence by listening to silence, but the trouble with listening to silence is the problem of hearing the voices of silence. Perhaps the voices are echoes only of my voice(s). Perhaps the voices are illusions I pretend to hear because I fear silence. Perhaps the voices resist my control, are uncontrollable. Perhaps the voices voice languages I do not know.

*

> A person who can "impersonate in writing" (inscribe) many different voices is an accomplished stylist, for style in writing is largely a matter of giving voice to what is silent. (Scholl 267)

*

Because silence is a word, a sign, can silence ever be silent? Is silence in the eyes, ears, tongue, nose, fingertips of the beholder? Do I hear/not-hear silence? feel/not-feel silence? taste/not-taste silence? smell/not-smell silence? see/not-see silence?

*

FROM A WINDOW SILENT SEEN

a girl in pink
    and a girl in blue
walk under a red tree
(with just a dash of green)
crunching dead leaves
the blue girl
    picks a yellow flower and
        offers it with a low bow
            to the pink girl
the pink girl giggles
    the blue girl giggles
the girl in pink
    and the girl in blue
stare at the blond boy
    passing
    in the black Fiero

*

Silence of intimates, silence of mime, silence of private reading, silence of liturgical worship, silence in death, silence of the to-be-said, silence of God, silence of the unknown, silence of an unanswered letter, doorbell, telephone, call, silence of nothing-to-say, silence of nothing-I-want-to-say, silence of consent, silence of omission, silence of reservation, silence of good manners, silence of the mute, compelled silence, compelling silence, silence in sleep, silence of the absurd, silence of nothingness, silence on a crowded bus, silence of fear, silence of the past, silence of indifference, silence of an unwritten or unread or unspoken or unheard text, silence at a party, silence of not-listening, silence of no noise, silence of the abyss, silence of the universe, silence of autism, silence of the deaf, silence of a monk, silence of the abused, silence of memory.

*

Be silent. Being silent. What is the difference?

*

"Language after all consists of silence as well as sound, and mime is still communication . . ., but by the language of action" (Barth 67).

*

> To write is to make oneself the echo of what cannot stop talking--and because of this, in order to become its echo, I must to a certain

> extent impose silence on it. To this incessant speech I bring the decisiveness, the authority of my own silence. Through my silent mediation, I make perceptible the uninterrupted affirmation, the giant murmur in which language, by opening, becomes image, becomes imaginary, an eloquent depth, an indistinct fullness that is empty.
> (Blanchot, Gaze 69)

*

When Job sat in the ashes scraping his leprous flesh, Job's friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, sat with him for seven days and seven nights in silence. But eventually they insisted on explaining Job's catastrophe. If only they'd remained silent.

*

Am I one of the silenced or one of the silencers?

*

Still silent, silent in stillness, the silent suffer, the suffering of silence, silence suffices, sufficiency of silence, satisfying silence, silent satisfaction, sulky silence, silky silence, silent suggestion, suggestive silence, supernal silence, supercilious silence, silent subjects, silence of subjugation, sanctified silence, sanctioned silence, sanitized silence, sanity of silence, silent scene, seen silence, scent of silence, sent in silence, sensed silence, senseless silence, sensuous silence, silence of service, servile silence, spur to silence, spurious silence, staunch silence, staunched silence, silent stirring, stirring silence, submissive silence, subservient silence, subversive silence.

*

> There are these two sides to language: _langue_ and _parole_. Langue is the great-given, the sum total of words and grammar and literature and concluded speech. Parole is what one of us says, the uniqueness of the speaking (writing) person. If you are unlucky, the great-given swamps you, and even when you speak, you are silent. If you are incredibly lucky, and if you work your ass off, the great-given sounds, not over, but _in_ your unique speaking. If that happens, then you have found a Voice. (Kroetsch 23)

*

Louis L'Amour once bragged to a reporter from _People_ that he could write on a busy New York street. Of course a _People_ photographer took a picture of a grinning Louis L'Amour sitting in the middle of a busy

New York street with a typewriter, apparently typing. Why do I need silence?

*

What is the relation between silence and the ocean of textuality? Am I awash in unsilence? Then silence punctuates the unsilence and makes it possible to hear the unsilence, to know the unsilence as unsilence. Silence is the sign that divides the seamless web of textuality. Without the productive gaps of silence, voice(s) in writing/talking comprise(s) cacophony only.

*

"Talk is essential to the human spirit. It is the human spirit. Speech, not silence" (Gass 159).

*

"Silence mothers language; it is the womb of discourse" (Kamboureli 52).

*

"Silence can be a fullness--emptiness, pregnant with meaning, or it can be a void, a wasteland in which no creative thinking can grow" (Bindeman 128).

*

The composer John Cage performed his piece called 4'33" by walking on the stage and sitting at the piano in silence for four minutes and thirty-three seconds. Many regard it as Cage's finest work.

*

"We need . . . to learn to listen to the often silent speech of the masses" (Pêcheux 633). Why? How?

*

In Aesop's fable of the boy, the father, and the donkey everybody speaks except the donkey (the silence is wise). In the Old Testament story of Balaam the donkey speaks (the speech is wise). Moral: silent or speaking an ass is a smart ass.

*

As a student in elementary school I learned silence, learned to sit patiently, learned to pretend listening, learned to speak only the right (officially sanctioned) answers. I learned silence well. Too well. A well of silence. How can I know if I've drowned in the well?

*

"When a silence opens up before us, we quickly cover it over with words" (Bindemann 1).

*

"Silence posits itself as the language of the hidden, the articulation hiding in the recesses of the throat, in the cave of the mouth" (Kamboureli 52).

*

Are the voices of the silent ever heard?

*

> Most school students or pupils most of the time are silent, or better, silenced. They are silent because their communicative capacities are regulated by the approved, proper, rewarded occasions for talk and writing. (Corrigan 20)

*

Are the voices of conscience, memory, spirit, unconscious, hungry with desire for the other, ever silent? Have I ever known silence? What do I hear in this quiet room? Refrigerator cooling system, clock, furnace, cars, water in pipes. What sounds would I hear in a sound-proof room? Noises of the body--gurgles, cracks, squishes. Can a living body be silent? Is a cadaver silent? Always I hear sounds--so many sounds--actual, imagined, remembered. Is silence ever silent?

*

"silence is a screen between, silence reflects what does not get said. the apparent silence of two heads looking out of each its own space" (Marlatt, "seeing" 174).

*

With each new year I grow more silent, less sure of my words, less sure of their worth, less sure of their reception; I grow less gregarious, less demonstrative, more still, perhaps still more.

*

"The majority of working people . . . remain, for the most part, strangers to the public realm, upholding the status quo through their silence" (Repo 95).

*

Am I so conditioned and habituated to hearing certain voices that I can no longer listen to silence, the hidden voices of unconscious or cunning control, subliminal silence, sublime silence, the unspoken or unwritten which lurks behind the spoken or written, the background voices drowned out by the foreground voices, the suppressed voices which are inevitable in all texts because all texts are produced and transmitted and constrained by historico-socio-economic processes that valorize some voices and discriminate against other voices?

*

A monk was cloistered in a bare cell. Before locking the door behind him the abbot explained, You have taken a vow of silence. At the end of five years you will be permitted one sentence, two sentences at the end of ten years, and three at the end of fifteen years.

At the end of five years the abbot appeared before the monk. You have one sentence.

The monk mumbled, It's a little cold in this cell.

At the end of ten years the abbot appeared again. You may speak two sentences.

The monk reluctantly whispered, It's a little cold. The food is a bit meager.

At the end of fifteen years the abbot again showed up. You may say three sentences.

The monk glanced quickly around his cell. It's a little cold. The food is a bit meager. The stone floor is hard for sleeping.

The abbot exploded. OUT. OUT. You've been here for fifteen years and all you've done is complain.

*

> Since profane or coarse language often fills the speech of people living in dehumanized environments--battlefields, ghettos, assembly lines--the practical effect of banning such speech is to cut off the voices of soldiers, workers, minorities, and others whose plight tells us things we don't want to hear. (Moffett, Storm 122)

*

"Silence is powerlessness" (Faery 204).

*

DISEASES OF THE TONGUE ARE MANY

surgical removal:

1. mouth widely opened
   with a gag
2. tongue transfixed
   with stout silk
3. tongue pulled well
   out of the mouth
4. tongue at the base
   cut with short snips
5. tongue seized with
   Wells' forceps, removed

*

> Women have been silenced as women--told we are stupid because we are women, told that our thoughts are trivial because we are women, told that our experiences as woman are unspeakable, told that women can't speak the language of significance--then had our ideas appropriated by men, only to notice that those ideas have suddenly become worthy, even creative. (MacKinnon 112)

*

"What has caused the cultural alienation--the silence, the marginality, the secondary status of women?" (Gilbert, "Postcard" 35)

*

A scream of silence. A cliché? I don't want to use a cliché (arriving at a party with a Tip Top sweater wrapped around my shoulders) except that the starving, the dying, the tortured, the grieving, the abused, the lonely scream with screams of silence--no clichés. Why aren't they heard?

*

"If we have been silenced for centuries and speak an oppressor's tongue, then liberation for the lesbian must begin with language" (Zimmerman, Bonnie 213).

*

> In the culture of silence the masses are mute, that is, they are prohibited from creatively taking part in the transformations of their society and therefore prohibited from being . . . . They are nevertheless alienated from the power responsible for their silence. (Freire 50)

*

Each culture of silence requires opportunities for a dialogic exploration of lived existence, an interactive reflection on praxis, a passionate, radical gesture of love manifested and extended in the politicizing, problematizing, thematizing, codifying of the actual, real experience of persons whose understanding of themselves as subjects depends on becoming more human, more created in the image of their Creator with personality and will and freedom.

*

> The dependent society is by definition a silent society. Its voice is not an authentic voice, but merely an echo of the voice of the metropolis--in every way, the metropolis speaks, the dependent society listens. (Freire, 73)

*

At the end of Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus Ludwig Wittgenstein concludes: "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent" (189). But (Wittgenstein invites my audacious "but" with a gracious disclaimer: "My propositions are elucidatory in this way: he who understands me finally recognizes them as senseless, when he has climbed out through them, on them, over them" [189].) is there anything we cannot speak/write about? Is not the "being silent" a kind of speaking/writing, even signifying more in the silence than an uttered statement--logical, linear, level--might signify? In other words, are there occasions when silence signifies more potently than utterance, not because silence is superior to utterance but because silence and utterance are inextricably related, two manifestations of language, diastole and systole, like the two pistons of the Acadia double-cylinder engine traditionally used in Newfoundland fishing boats, pumping with the immutable rhythm: put put put put put put.

*

Whole books have been written about silence. Why does silence generate so much noisy discussion?

NAN'S NOTE

1

I'm marching through the high grass
in Uncle Cam's yard on my way to Ro Carter's store
and I can't read my grandmother's note
because I know Nan is watching
from her window, is always watching,
and I need to read the note
(how else can I know if Nan is ordering
Fudgicles and macaroons and an apricot pie)
and hiking in the high grass, pretending
I'm David Livingstone hunting natives in need,
I can see the air, still gray
painted with the dust of my father's Rambler
rumbled into the sky as it roared down Lynch's Lane,
my father's voice filling the air with scarlet words,
jesus h. christ, Carrie, if your mother turns up
the heat again, I'll saw the goddamn roof off,
my grandmother convinced that with the new hot air
furnace and a duct in every room she controls
the whole world with a plastic button on the wall,
and when cold turns the thermostat with a deft twist
like a Las Vegas shark at a roulette wheel
while my father groans, jesus, Carrie, it's cooler
in the mill behind the pulp grinders
where, my father insists, men sometimes melt
and all that gets sent home is a shoe box
of teeth and finger-nails and toe-nails.

2

Ro Carter unfolds the note slowly
like a love letter he doesn't want,
closes one eye and rubs his tongue
around his teeth. Can't hardly
read your grandmother's writing.
A trap for a caribou?
No such thing, is there?
The note has one line:
(not Fudgicles and macaroons and an apricot pie)
an ashtray with a caribou.
Well, I'll be darned,
the ashtray with the caribou.
Yes, yes, I've got it
poked away somewhere.
Years ago I got that ashtray.
For tourists. Couldn't sell it.
Didn't get any tourists.
Only Jehoshaphat knows where it is now.
Ro Carter closes the other eye
and stamps his feet.
Here it is. Right where I left it.
Your grandmother taking up smoking,
is she? I'll put it on her bill.

3

Pushing through the high grass in Uncle Cam's yard
I bear the ashtray wrapped in brown paper
and David Livingstone is no longer hunting natives
in need and the air is no longer gray and scarlet
with dust and words, my father faraway
in Birchy Cove sitting under a chestnut tree
with Uncle Jim and Fox and Bud who laugh a lot
and never touch thermostats, my father says,
and my grandmother smiles when I give her the ashtray,
a bronze glass bowl with a leaden caribou standing
on the edge and grooves in the antlers to stick
burning cigarettes and a picture
of Bowater's Pulp and Paper Mill inscribing
a message in the air with ribbons of smoke:
Welcome to Corner Brook, but I don't ask Nan
about the Fudgicles and macaroons and apricot pie.

4

With the sun sinking
behind Blow-Me-Down Mountain
my father's Rambler slips up the lane
and my father slides into the living room,
adjusts the thermostat,
opens windows, grins at me.
This for me? From your grandmother?
He slips the string off the parcel,
all his actions slow and easy
like an Anglican pastor.
My father taps gently
on my grandmother's door,
looks in, Nan propped
up on four pillows
almost sitting in bed,
her head turned
toward the window,
eyes closed and breathing
with the rhythm of pretending
to be asleep.
Thanks, Missus, it's a lovely ashtray.
My father closes the door quietly.
I ask my father why Nan gave him
an ashtray even though he stopped
smoking two years ago.
His brown eyes are burnished
bronze like the ashtray.
Perhaps I'll take it up again, he says,
and perhaps tomorrow I'll charge
through the high grass in Uncle Cam's yard
with another note from my grandmother
for Fudgicles and macaroons and an apricot pie.

Q: WHERE DO(ES) THE VOICE(S) COME FROM?

Michel Foucault explores the question of who is speaking in a text. In "What Is an Author?" Foucault describes the work as "its author's murderer" (142). He debunks the common conception of the author as an authentic genius, an originator, a creator (158-160), and proposes that an author's name performs "a classificatory function" because "such a name permits one to group together a certain number of texts, define them, differentiate them from and contrast them to others" (147). The author, then, is "a certain functional principle by which, in our culture, one limits, excludes, and chooses" (159). Foucault is concerned with the way some discourses are awarded the status of the "author-function" while other discourses are not (148).

The author's name is a sign which indicates either authority or non-authority, either membership or exclusion in the socially convened and regulated society of writers. Foucault conjectures about extending membership privileges in the writing club (159). Instead of asking, "Who really spoke?," Foucault proposes asking:

> What are the modes of existence of this discourse? Where has it been used, how can it

> circulate, and who can appropriate it for himself? What are the places in it where there is room for possible subjects? Who can assume these various subject-functions? (160)

Foucault's concern highlights the ways by which writers are awarded and denied author-ity. The ideologically constructed parameters of inclusion and exclusion which constrain writing are boundaries determining who has a voice and who does not.

WHO'S AFRAID OF JACQUES COUSTEAU?

In the low summer sun my children
are walking a yellow road across the cove
plunging into the water away from me
sitting on the gray beach writing
a poem about long Sunday afternoons
in July and August when my father drove
my brother and me out of the city
through Gillams
and Summerside
to Wild Cove
so he could sit on the beach
and whittle boats out of driftwood
with jagged circles of tin for rudders
rigged with cereal box sails
(Bobby Orr with strong knees
laughing over a bowl of Wheaties)
launched without champagne
three or four at a time, all the same
while my brother and I swam
like Johnny Weissmuller and wrestled
crocodiles and buried one another
like the Cherokee buried their enemies
with just heads sticking out of the sand
so ants could eat their brains
(my brother claimed ants would die
from malnutrition in my head)
and my father baked in the sun
and whittled an armada of sailing ships
and for years Jacques Cousteau
shoving the Calypso through garbage
in the oceans of the world
has been cursing my father's boats
and now I write, the flotsam
of memories whittled and shaped
in words and set afloat.
What will Jacques Cousteau
say about my poems?

R: WHERE DO(ES) THE VOICE(S) COME FROM?

Donald M. Murray often personifies the writing process with human qualities of intention and will. For Murray "the central act of writing is listening" ("Listening" 56). He is concerned with "the writing that wants to make its voice heard" (46). He remarks: "My job is to listen to the evolving writing. The piece of writing will, if I listen carefully, tell me how it needs to be written" (56). For Murray

> neither published writers nor beginning students have much control over what a piece of writing says as it is talking its way towards meaning. Both must listen to the piece of writing to hear where it is going with the same anticipation and excitement we feel when a master storyteller spins out a tale. (57)

As a writer Murray describes himself as "a dog cocking" his "ears to a strange and distant sound" (50). Not unlike Frankenstein's creature or Guiseppi's Pinnochio, writing, according to Murray, acquires a life of its own. It becomes more than the material signifiers and conventions of a language system, more than communication, more than an expression of emotion. Writing detaches itself from the writer and tells the writer "what it wishes to become." The words "collect themselves into a meaning" (58).

While I concur with Murray's view that a writer listens to her evolving writing in an ongoing process of hearing, rehear(s)ing, revising, revoicing, I have a few reservations about personifying writing with attributes of will and intention: Does Murray's conviction that a writer must first be a hearer who listens to the voice(s) of the writing in order to learn what to say promote the writer as a receiver, a secretary, a scribe? What is the source of the voices? Do some writers have impaired hearing? Is listening to the voice(s) in writing akin to listening to the voices at the Tower of Babel--a confused, unintelligible babble?

ONE DAY IN THE LIFE OF TOBIAS TOBIT

1

People of Edmonton, rise and shine. Rod Eurchuk and CKXM 100 hope your day will be the best you've ever known.

A sixteen-year-old male was found dead this morning in a northwest home when police responded to a call. The death is being treated as a homicide. Details at seven.

An accident involving a truck and two cars has blocked Groat Bridge. Police are on the scene. Motorists are advised to use an alternate route.

Mainly cloudy skies with flurries for the afternoon and tonight. A low of minus six and a high of one. The long term forecast calls for more of the same.

Now let's enjoy Anne Murray's "You've Got a Friend."

2

QT/880 H ESSO IGA ULC CAI ITC CIBC ASA PTA CSMR ATCO CN
ALCB CUPE NAIT IBEW CMPA X CMI TV NDP REMAX DM IBM RRSP
PC ETS AMEX CC 240SX CBC GRE VBS XL NBA NTA AIDS ABC T4
CFL RCA MUN UPC GMAC VHF AV RP CA VCR AM NBS GMAT S NEC
ELAC NBTA UHF PWP FM CUPW VW UNB NT 740GL ATA GE CMA AA

3

PREGNANT? There are some problems we can't solve. EXIT BY REAR.

We try harder. Why don't you try it?
You gotta be who you gotta be.

Where do you go when you can't go home?
LUCK (everything you always wanted):
Emergency Exit Instructions
Located on Forward Pillar
of This Window

When you're this big they call you mister. It makes a lot of sense. Evolution. Do not step down.

QUALITY. Now GIGANTIC. It's always been good for you. To discover its soul KEEP ARM IN till the light white cow comes home.

If you're not feeding it, who is?
Back to boiled, scrambled, and over-easy.

Bet you run out.

If you're over one year old, please read this:

CITIZEN ACTION RENT RED
(Get the complete story.)

PARTNERS IN PROGRESS
HAVE A BLAST FOR A BUCK

Reflect on your day to the heart of wonder.
Quick, your slip is showing.

NEXT STOP

4

Just remember there's a reason why we're here; there's a reason for everything.

5

Hello, Mr. Tobit, my name is Ted and I'm calling for Wainwright's Carpet and Upholstery Cleaning to inform you we are currently in your area and would be happy to arrange for two qualified cleaners to clean your rugs and upholstery for the all-time low price of thirty-nine dollars and ninety-five cents.

No carpet? What about your upholstery?

Selling it soon? All of it? Wouldn't you like it cleaned before you sell it?

You're planning to sell dirty furniture?

Mr. Tob . . . .

6

The unitary voice of autonomous subjectivity, derived from phonocentrism and logocentrism which posit the transcendental signified, originary essence, self-referentiality, self-presence, is displaced by the plurisignification of the decentered self exploded and divided and constituted by the polysemy of language--a shifting, untameable, indeterminate, heteroglossic network of signs, tropes, traces, supplements, absences, differences, oppositions, gaps, codes without firm teleology, an ontological mish-mash of meaning-making, an overdetermined, open text inviting the disseminating production of power and pleasure, an eventuating epistemic event without end (because without beginning), but always inviting entry, insertion in the textual flow, a self-reflexive discourse vibrating among the nodes of self-criticism and self-transformation, the self never one but legion, in process, mutable, a productivity of being and becoming, the production of polyvalent signifying effects, the self inscribed in language use, the self interpellated in a matrix of discursive formations, sign systems, and hegemonic historical and social practices and psychoanalytic operations, a performance of multiple voices from a multiplicitous subjectivity, a symphonic cacophony.

7

I just thought I'd call to say I love you.

8

Get it up.
I'm stiff.
Hey, big guy.
What's this for?
To get that big you need supplements.
Does it hurt?
Deeper. Go deeper.
Push. PUSH.
You've got it.
I don't like the machines.
Spot me?
Lookin' good.
You did it all yourself.
Could I work in here?
Thought I'd do a few from behind.
He's always staring in the mirror.
Tired?
I pulled something.
Ice might help.
Let it out slow, easy.
Even though it hurts it still feels good.
I'm done.

9

PUSH/PULL SMOKING PROHIBITED NO EATING OR DRINKING WOMEN/MEN DANGER: HIGH VOLTAGE TEMPORARILY OUT OF SERVICE DO NOT FOLD BILL INSERT BILL FACE UP INTO BILL ACCEPTOR IN/OUT WELCOME NO ADMITTANCE TO UNAUTHORIZED PERSONNEL THIS DOOR MUST BE LOCKED AT ALL TIMES/PLEASE DO NOT LOCK THIS DOOR IMPORTANT LEAVE A MESSAGE WASH YOUR HANDS OUT OF ORDER OPEN/CLOSED DO

NOT DISTURB NO ACCESS DUPLICATING PULL DOWN ON/OFF NO DOGS ALLOWED WATCH YOUR STEP REMOVE BOOTS MINORS ARE FORBIDDEN TO OPERATE MACHINE CHANGE MUST SHOWER JOBS ON LEAVE BM23456789 NO BAGS ALLOWED INSERT PRESS REMOVE SMOKING PERMITTED SPECIAL STUDENT NOTICES ENTRANCE/EXIT AMERICAN STANDARD TAMPERING UNLAWFUL STAFF LOUNGE INFORMATION WORKS STORAGE MADE IN CANADA USE OTHER DOOR PLANNING BOARD HONEYWELL PHONE SHOP HOURS OF OPERATION DEPOSIT/RETURN FRESHLY BREWED COFFEE INSPECTION THE REAL CHOICE

10

A travelling salesman broke down near a farm. Went up to the barn to get help. The farmer was a friendly fellow. While the salesman was chatting about the weather and his car, he saw this pig running across the field. A big pig with a peg leg, a wooden leg attached to its shoulder by a leather harness. Well, the salesman couldn't believe his eyes. "Skipper, what happened to the pig?" he asked.

The farmer looked at the salesman and at the pig. "That's some pig. Let me tell you about that pig. He's out there now rounding up the sheep. Better than any sheep dog I ever had."

"But what happened to the pig's leg?"

"That's some pig. A few weeks ago the house caught on fire. Everybody asleep. That pig scratched on the front door and woke us up. Saved our lives."

"But what happened to the pig's leg?"

"That's some pig. Just the other day my tractor rolled over on me. I was pinned. In bad shape. That pig rushed over and dug me out. Saved my life."

"But, Skipper, what happened to the pig's leg?"

"Well, boy, you can't eat a great pig like that all at once."

11

The love in your heart
wasn't put there to stay.
Love isn't love
till you give it away.

12

Hi, Tobias. You don't look so great. Sick? Too bad. See you soon, hey?

13

EXTRA STRENGTH EFFERDENT POWERS AWAY
EVEN STUBBORN STAINS EVERY DAY

NEXT TIME YOU HURT TAKE ENTROPHEN

YOUR BODY LOVES BEEF

14

Yes.
Good luck.
Too late.
That's what you said.
I know that.
How's it going, Steve.
I'm not going.
That's good.
I know but . . . .
What happened?
For two days now . . . .
Why?
I don't want to anymore.
That annoys me.
What are you saying?
I watch too much t.v.
Why not?
Have I lied to you today?
In all my life . . . .
I am. I really am.
I haven't seen Charlie.
I mean . . . .
I don't want to talk about it.
Isn't it awful.
Hang in there.
I guess you know.
Yeah.
No.
Oh.
Hey, Jonah.
That's good.
Have fun.
See your notes?
Read a whole book.
You have what?
She started throwing her clothes at people.
No point in explaining it to you.
What do you mean?
Boring.
Probably.

'Cause a couple times . . . .
What are they for?
You know the . . . .
He's crazy. Five hundred dollars?
Disgusting.
Birds and bees and rubber trees.
Joe told me.
I agree.
The time . . . .
See you around.
Lot easier.
If it wasn't for Carol . . . .
He's gone.
I'm serious.
Don't trust him.
Because . . . .
I don't understand.
It would have been great but . . . .
He's nice.
Did you go?
I'm glad we talked.

15

Dear Shopper:

Did you know that eight out of ten new products fail? Why? Because people like you and me decide they're not needed.

Now, by filling out this special survey, you can influence quality improvements and the development of new products. It won't even cost you a stamp.

I can assure you that the few moments you take to complete this survey will be time well spent.

Sincerely,
Diana Simona

16

Net income (line 238) (or if you filed a form T583 election, use line 7 of that form--if negative, enter zero) less any capital losses of other years allowed (line 256), employee home relocation loan deduction (line 249), any stock option and shares deductions (line 247) and capital gains deduction (line 255).

17

FOR DISCRIMINATING TASTES DISCOVER THE PEAK OF REFRESHMENT. DISCOVER THE HEIGHTS OF ALPINE TASTE. A TASTE YOU CAN CALL YOUR OWN. MILD AND MENTHOL.

WARNING: HEALTH AND WELFARE CANADA ADVISES THAT SMOKING CAUSES LUNG CANCER, HEART DISEASE, EMPHYSEMA, FETAL INJURY, PREMATURE BIRTH, LOW BIRTH WEIGHT, INGROWN TOENAILS, RUNNY NOSE, LOSS OF MEMORY, UNWANTED BODY HAIR, DEAD BRAIN CELLS, PSORIASIS, POOR EYESIGHT, AND MALARIA.

QUITTING SMOKING NOW GREATLY REDUCES SERIOUS RISKS TO YOUR HEALTH.

18

The words of Jesus are printed in red because they are on fire burning up the dross of your wrong living.

The words of Jesus are searing searchlights that expose your sin and reveal your evil thoughts.

The words of Jesus are flowing streams of honey to feed the hungry, to heal the sick, to comfort the grieving, to quench the thirsty.

The words of Jesus are a two-edged sword cutting away the cancer of your disobedience and rebellion.

The words of Jesus will get into your heart, deep, deep into your heart, and EXPLODE.

19

THIS OFFER MAY BE WITHDRAWN AT ANYTIME. SO BE SURE TO ACT NOW. ALL MAJOR CREDIT CARDS ACCEPTED.

20

What's red and white on the outside and gray on the inside?

Campbell's Cream of Elephant Soup.

21

I can find nothing wrong with this boy.

I've learned to trust my son. If he says he has a headache, I believe him.

I can find nothing wrong with this boy.

He's been complaining for four weeks about an ache on the right side of his head.

I can find nothing wrong with this boy.

Four weeks--a long time. Whenever I ask him about his head, it's always the same reply. Still hurts.

I can find nothing wrong with this boy.

I'm very concerned about him. He shouldn't have a headache that goes on and on.

I can find nothing wrong with this boy.

22

A JOURNEY INTO MISERY
FLOWERS AND DRINKS ALL AROUND
HOW TO SURVIVE A MID-LIFE CRISIS WITH DIGNITY
UP, UP AND AWAY
WE COULDN'T PRINT THIS IF IT WEREN'T TRUE
AN EIGHTY BILLION DOLLAR BUST
VISION OF HORROR
SHOPPING THE MALL
WAKING UP TO A NIGHTMARE
A FASHION REVOLT
A POISONOUS THREAT
BIGOTS IN THE IVORY TOWER
LETTING BYGONES BE BYGONES
SET YOUR COURSE FOR THE FUTURE
SAY GOODBYE TO THE AGE OF FREE RIDES
CONTEMPLATING THE NEXT STEP
THE DEFENSE DILEMMA
WAR OVER WORDS
VOTING FOR PEACE
CANADA'S RESOUNDING MAYBE VOTE
THE THOUGHTS THAT WOUND
SECOND THOUGHTS ON 1992
A TRAIL OF TERROR
A MAJOR NEW STEP
THE NEW LOOK
THE FACE OF POVERTY
UNMAKING THE QUAGMIRE
THE CUCUMBER SCANDAL
AN OLIVE BRANCH
A GLIMPSE OF GREATER PEACE
TRACING GOD'S FINGERPRINT
FORGING NEW RELATIONS
GOING HOME A WINNER

23

WHEN YOU
HEAR
THE QUESTION
SAY
YES

The forecast for tomorrow calls for overcast skies and snow. A cold front is coming our way from the northwest.

Don't forget Rod Eurchuk will help get your day started at six.

Meanwhile, a little soft music to ease the old day out.

Baby, I'm yours
Yours till the stars fall from the sky
Yours till the rivers run dry
I'm never blue
When my dreams come true

S: WHERE DO(ES) THE VOICE(S) COME FROM?

In his compelling essay, "Democratizing Literature: Issues in Teaching Working-Class Literature," Nicholas Coles argues that the history of English literature and criticism has privileged one kind of literature:

> A mode of reading concerned with discrimination of literariness entailed a preference for the obscure and highly wrought, and a bias against the work of those who were not traditionally members of the trained literary elite: the literature of women, of black, ethnic, and working-class writers--of most people, in other words--was excluded or admitted only by exception, in a form of discrimination that, at bottom, has less to do with valuations of literary quality than with the social distribution of power. (665)

Gerald Gregory supports Coles' perspective with his proposal in "Community-published Working-class Writing in Context":

> A fresh, democratic sense of print and books as available, stripped of authority and false dignity, written by flesh-and-blood people

> with particular points of view and purposes, and, therefore, susceptible of reply and rebuttal as well as respect and reverence--all this is self-evidently and powerfully educational. (228)

In recent months I have started writing about the ordinary experiences of growing up on the side of a hill where it was mostly winter, about my grandmother who could see her whole world from a bedroom window, about Jerry and Terry who dropped out of school in junior high and have been delivering Coca-Cola store-to-store ever since, about my mother who always got upset (but never said anything) when Mrs. Pollard borrowed her clothesline to hang her old worn clothes while Mrs. Pollard's line waved with negligees and underwear in pastel colours, about Mickey Greene who tied his father to a bed and set the bed afire, about Sadie Tompkins with a line of boyfriends (captains from the ships that carried paper along the eastern seaboard and across the Atlantic Ocean), about Tommy Winsor (in delivery dropped by a drunk doctor) who spent one day shaking his big red penis at everybody going up and down Lynch's Lane and the next day preaching to the same passers-by: Repent, you goddamned sinners bound for the fires of hell.

I have begun to write about people and experiences that I never wrote about in school where I tried to mimic the writing I read in class anthologies. I am glad I have broken through the constraints imposed by the expectations and models and evaluation procedures that defined my school experience. I only wish I had learned to challenge the constraints a long time ago.

THE DIVER

In the gray-blue sky my brother hung,
long and lean, his body a line
lined with taut muscles, and Macky's
mouth was a gaping hole in a scream
or laugh because my brother was making
the death-defying dive never dared
from the concrete abutment at the end
of the dam where the water was no more
than a foot deep though it got deeper,
out and out (if only you could fly
and my brother loved to fly).

Earlier in the summer
my brother climbed the arch
of heavy timbers that hold
the dam in place, and golden
in the falling sun, high
above our heads, he flew
through the air and sliced
the water, and was gone,
and Frazer moaned, He's dead,
but my brother emerged
slowly like a submarine,
and though he was silent,
I saw the quick smile.

In the still air my brother hung,
blonde and brown and blue, his head
tucked between his arms, hands clenched,
body a missile, toes pointed back
like jet engines, and Cec shouted, He's
doin' it; holy smoke, and my brother
needed to dive far out like shooting
off a rocket launch pad, out and out,
and since he knew he couldn't move fast
enough to reach orbit, knew he would come
down, he had to skip over the water
like a racing boat or run aground
on the rocky bottom.

Earlier in the summer
my brother chased his shadow
across the grass and leaped
off the rock, flying, shooting
just under the surface
like a torpedo, and Macky
grinned, He dives so shallow,
he hardly breaks the water,
but my brother just looked
at us with no smile
though I saw the purple sky
reflected in his eyes.

The gray-blue sky and still air broke
and my brother dropped, but he
didn't skip once, twice, three
times in quick smooth skips, and plunged
into the black water, and my eyes closed
but wouldn't stay closed, and my brother
stood in the water up to his knees.

I can't recall the dive
as a series of movements;
I remember only the still
moment when my brother hung
in the gray-blue sky
and that other moment
when he stood in the water
stained with his blood,
raw and bloody
like a skinned rabbit,
his eyes darting, searching,
as if he'd awaken
in a brightly lit room
he didn't know.

ARIA ON APORIA

The reader is invited to do what she wants with the following quotations. For example, any reader who is convinced that she knows the truth could cut out all quotations that contradict her truth. Any reader who enjoys the disseminating multiplicity of signs might cut out the quotations and shuffle and arrange them in at least a score of different ways (my preference). Fundamentalists and moralists and pundits might prefer to skip the section.

*

> Each day be open to the world, be ready to think; each day be ready not to accept what is said just because it is said, be predisposed to reread what is read; each day investigate, question, and doubt. I think it is most necessary to doubt. I feel it is always necessary not to be sure, that is, to be overly sure of "certainties." (Freire 181)

*

"The truth is not born and does not reside in the head of an individual person; it is born of the dialogical intercourse between people in the collective search for the truth" (Bakhtin, Poetics 90).

*

Borrowed from the Greek for impassable paths, aporia stands for difficulty and doubt, for linguistic impotence, for undecidability, for the multiplicitous nature of the sign (Leggo).

*

> I was paralyzed by the idea that I had to deliver the Truth--Moseslike; I began to write when I realized all I had to do was speculate, question, argue, create a model, take a position, define a problem, make an observation, propose a solution, illuminate a possibility to participate in a written conversation with my peers. (Murray, "Secrets" 147)

*

"When is a work 'about' meaninglessness and when is it simply meaningless?" (Dillard 25)

*

To produce a text (oral or written) is to court further texts propagating like randy rabbits in a green meadow. The process cannot be described by circular or linear metaphors, but by a metaphor of divergence--the dissemination of opinions about opinions, knowing no end, seeking the truth that is not, apparently always drawing closer to truth but in truth never doing so, which is still untrue because in the game of chasing the traces of signifiers, endlessly deferring and differing, there is truth even if it is the truth that there is no truth (only opinions) or the truth that it is more fun to chase non-truth than not chase at all or the truth that fun has purpose even though you cannot be sure what the purpose is or whether there is purpose--one more unconscious desire? one more ideologically constructed "value"? one more false hope to ward off the demons of despair? (Leggo)

*

> Through language, we imagine everything and everyone, we invent everything and everyone, we remember everything and everyone--including ourselves. Insofar as experience is available for comment, insofar as it has meaning, insofar as it is present to us--immediately in front of us now--it is available only as fiction: fingere (to shape or to make). (Cameron 71)

*

"Knowing that my knowledge is perspectival, language-based, culturally constructed, or what have you does not change in the slightest the things I believe to be true" (Tompkins 172).

*

> Writers settle for nothing less than absolute honesty in their work. This requires a special kind of writing discipline because you have to learn to throw away whatever is false, no matter how much it pleases you. Dishonesty in writing is insincerity, hypocrisy, a representing of yourself as something you are not. It may project what you would like to be, not what you are. (Stewart, Versatile 19)

*

> "I don't see much sense in that," said Rabbit.
>
> "No," said Pooh humbly, "there isn't. But there was *going* to be when I began it. It's just that something happened to it on the way." (Milne 264)

*

Innovative fictions are "literary stunts" that "have a kind of interest, as intellectual toys, but they engage us only for the moment" (Gardner, Fiction 49).

*

> Most writers are probably quarter-formed. Hopeless and helpless. One's complete sentences are attempts, as often as not, to

> complete an incomplete self with words. If you were a fully realized person whatever the hell that would be--you wouldn't fool around writing books. (Gass 175)

*

> "When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean--neither more nor less."
>
> "The question is," said Alice, "whether you can make words mean so many different things."
>
> "The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master--that's all." (Carroll 184)

*

"To say that the author can take no stand at all in his writing is as mindless and as irresponsible as to say that he is always writing moralized fables" (Ong, "Mimesis" 39).

*

"People learn from the truth even though the truth is a mess" (Elbow, Teachers 133).

*

> There is a paradox here . . . genuine depth of emotional response can only be achieved by

> those willing and able to immerse themselves in amazing artificiality--in language, in literary device, in rhetoric. The "real," in other words, is only available to us through an embrace of the unreal and artificial. (Metcalf 52)

*

The challenge of writing is that I can never get it right because there is no "it" to get "right"; the condemnation of writing is that I can never get it right because there is no "it" to get "right" (Leggo).

*

> Even should we agree that in the world of wall-to-wall discourse the aporia is inevitable . . . we must resist being pushed there, unless we wish to find ourselves with [Paul] de Man and other avant-garde critics in the realm of the thoroughly predictable linguistic transcendental, where all literature speaks synchronically and endlessly the same tale. In the rarefied region of the undecidable, what is called literature is emptied of all linguistic force except the force of its own duplicitous self-consciousness. In this realm the

> discourse of literature would suppress the powerfully situating and coercive discourses of politics, economics, and other languages of social manipulation. (Lentricchia 317)

*

"Language need not know the world perfectly in order to communicate perceptions adequately" (Dillard 71).

*

"The secret of a labyrinth is only the way out, whereas I, for one, am looking for a way in" (Ellmann 191-192).

*

"The truth of writing, that is . . . (the) nontruth, cannot be discovered in ourselves by ourselves. And it is not the object of a science, only of a history that is recited, a fable that is repeated" (Derrida, Dissemination 74).

*

> Good writing is most effective when we tell the truth about who we are and what we think . . . . When we tell the truth, we risk the possibility that people may not like us. But writing truthfully is the only way to discover what we know about ourselves and our world. (Lindemann 161)

*

"The ground of everything seems to shift if we consider knowledge as an effect of language instead of language as an effect of knowledge" (Johnson, Difference 73).

*

> If you take really bowel-turning material, from the point of view of its pragmatic importance in the world, and surround it like kitty litter with stuff that is there purely for play, then you can get an electric line between the two poles clothes would turn white simply hanging on. (Gass 160)

*

"There is something about plain writing which smacks of moral goodness" (Dillard 120).

*

If I claim that all texts are undecidable I have made a decisive statement motivated by confidence in my ability to write a text that is decidable, or at least generating a measure of decidability sufficiently worthwhile to posit the claim in the first place. (Leggo)

*

> It is thus an obscure perception of the hidden possibility of obscurity that attracts the suspicions of the sly, casual reader, who would otherwise have been satisfied with

> whatever intelligibility the surface of the writing might present. Obscurity, in other words, is not encountered on the way to intelligibility like an obstacle, but rather lies beyond it, as what prevents the reader from being satisfied with his own reading. Obscurity is an excess, not a deficiency, of meaning. (Johnson, Difference 68)

*

"In the post-structuralist era, gobbledygook and obscurity are enfranchised" (Winterowd 87).

*

The binary opposition between seriousness and play leads to misconceptions about writing which is, after all, indisputably, inarguably, unquestionably most serious when it is playful (Leggo).

*

"What we want is passionate virtuosity. If these pieces aren't also moving, then the experiment is unsuccessful, and their author is lost in the funhouse indeed" (Barth 79).

*

> Many of the most academically popular writers of our time are . . . more interested in understanding juxtapositions than in

> understanding how we should live. They are concerned with making beautiful or interesting or ornate or curious objects. As for language--when I talk to you, I speak English and try to choose words, from all the possible words in the world, which seem most likely to say what I mean. (Gardner, "Debate" 21)

*

"Not insolence but tolerance . . . the refusal of arguments resting on authority and academic dogmatism" (Derrida, Memoires 12).

*

> The problem is not changing people's consciousness--or what's in their heads--but the political, economic, institutional régime of the production of truth. It's not a matter of emancipating truth from every system of power (which would be a chimera, for truth is already power) but of detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic and cultural, within which it operates at the present time. (Foucault, Power 133)

*

Rhetorical contrivance produces truth (Leggo).

*

"Must arbitrariness always be damning? Must it forever be out of bounds not as a subject but as a technique?" (Dillard 29)

*

Truth is not a commodity to be packaged and dispensed in neat portions. Perhaps it is not untrue to suggest that each one of us is the truth--at least as much of the truth as can be identified. Not the truth in an empirical, objective way, but subjects interpellated in language, in meaning-making, constantly striving to create the world. (Leggo)

*

"A word is like a schoolgirl's room--a complete mess--so the great thing is to make out a way of seeing it all as ordered, as right, as inferred and following" (Gass 160).

*

"Fiction has no borders; everything is open, you have a limitless possibility of knowing the truth" (Doctorow 105).

*

> If it is true that texts always undo readings, it is equally true that texts constitute meanings. So the real theoretical

> question is what it is in language that necessarily produces meanings but that also undoes what it produces. (de Man, "Interview" 587)

*

"Human beings are engaged in a perpetual adventure with its attendant risks. More deeply, however, they place themselves not only into question but also in play" (Lefebvre 87).

*

> There is nothing illegitimate about adhering to absolutist doctrines, rejecting all but apodictic proofs, or teasing out the logical difficulties of the interdefining structure of la langue itself. Nor is there anything illegitimate about constructing essays that offer the kind of intellectual stimulation, and perhaps aesthetic pleasure, that the human mind has for centuries found in sophisms. However, parole appears, depends on, and requires interpretation within presumptively recoverable contexts. (Harris, Wendell 130)

*

"Carnivalesque discourse breaks through the laws of a language censored by grammar and semantics and, at the same time, is a social and political protest" (Kristeva 65).

*

> "Then you should say what you mean," the March Hare went on.
>
> "I do," Alice hastily replied; "at least--at least I mean what I say--that's the same thing, you know."
>
> "Not the same thing a bit!" said the Hatter. "Why, you might just as well say that 'I see what I eat' is the same thing as 'I eat what I see'!" (Carroll, 67)

*

Because I am constructed in language, interpellated into subjectivity by my relationship to language, I am always seeking to be constructed further in language--to be fulfilled, given power or authority or purpose (Leggo).

*

> None of this high-minded rhetoric is meant to deny the fact that fiction is a kind of play. The writer works out what he thinks as much for the joy of it as for any other reson. Yet the play has its uses and earnestness. (Gardner, Fiction 80)

*

"Sense, and not the skill to dazzle, is the basal criterion for art" (Dillard 32).

*

> Aesthetic realism . . . is any set of artistic conventions felt by people on a particular level of a particular culture at a particular period to be literally imitative of their imagination of the actual world. (Barth 222)

*

"Writing promises truth, but all the while writing defers truth in order to keep the promise, and not its fulfillment, in operation" (Neel 133).

*

Writing is not self-expression; writing is self-construction (Leggo).

*

> One of the sad things about fiction is that it's so organized and unambiguous. It is facile and inauthentic for fiction to suggest that things are organized and can be wound up as neatly as they are in most novels, and yet the novel must impose form on random experience. (Johnson, Diane 212)

*

"It is our fiction that validates us" (Wittig, *Body* 10).

*

"The central features commonly ascribed to *avant-garde* movements: on the one hand, eagerness to experiment and hostility to tradition, but on the other, nihilistic tendencies and a certain self-destructive urge" (Hutchinson 20).

*

The consciousness of game in writing spells serious game--an oxymoron (Leggo).

*

> To glimpse a world where verbal ornament is as essential as essence, as serious as serious purpose, and as needful for man, and where ornament and essence . . . like breathing out and breathing in, constitute the life-giving oscillation of human life (Lanham 58)

*

"Writers whose motive is to *inform* me should make my task easier, not more difficult" (Winterowd 87).

*

> [For the deconstructionists] belief is always

> accompanied by the belief that what one believes cannot be the full story: there is always something further, something more, to be understood in understanding. (Ray 201)

*

Writing does not enable the writer to hammer down secure truth, but it does enable the writer to explore possibilities of meaning (Leggo).

*

"The last thing apt to happen in writing is 'self-discovery.' Instead, what happens in writing is a forever becoming-present" (Neel 124).

*

> The more a text is "mad"--the more, in other words, it resists interpretation--the more specific modes of its resistance to reading constitute its "subject" and its literariness. What literature recounts in each text is precisely the specificity of its resistance to our reading. (Felman 254)

*

> I wonder to myself a lot:
> "Now is it true, or is it not,
> That what is which and which is what?"
> (Milne 94)

*

"Write truthfully but with cunning" (Malamud 157).

T: WHERE DO(ES) THE VOICE(S) COME FROM?

William E. Coles, Jr. stresses the ways in which language can be used to explore possibilities of meaning and to constitute understanding and knowledge. He argues that the writer is actively involved in experimenting with different voices, in weaving his voices among the numerous voices of others, in composing a world where his voices can be heard and have an impact. According to Coles language is constitutive and ontological:

> I value writing . . . as a uniquely powerful instrument for learning, as a special way of thinking and coming to know. I value it as a form of language using, language using understood as the primary means by which all of us run orders through chaos thereby giving ourselves the identities we have. Looking at writing from this point of view gives me a way of seeing the ability to compose in sentences as an ability to conceptualize, to build structures, to draw inferences, to develop implications, to generalize intelligently--in short to make connections, to work out relationships--between this idea and that idea, words and other words,

> sentences and other sentences, language and experience. (Plural I 285)

Coles wants students to be "masters of language, not slaves to it":

> What the activities of reading and writing are concerned with, the use of language to locate one's self at a given moment in time, can have something to do with who one chooses to become, maybe even with who one chooses to be. (Composing 8)

I recently read some of my poems to a drama education class. I frequently referred to the autobiographical context of the poems. I described the hill where I grew up, the weather, the personality of my father, the antics of my grandmother, and the delights and adventures of a Newfoundland childhood. But even as I related the anecdotes, I kept asking, What am I doing? My poems don't describe events in the way they happened. They're not autobiographical with claims to empirical veracity. In my poems am I expressing my/self or constituting my/self or constructing a plurality of selves--sites from which to observe my world or, more cogently, sites where my world is disclosed? I like John Barth's suggestion that "our fictions construct us, at least as subcontractors" (210).

A GIRL WITH BARE FEET

on an empty road
between Brighton
and Morrow's Cove
I saw a girl
walking in the dust
(she wore no shoes)
but I didn't stop and ask
if she needed a ride
   because I didn't want
her to fall in love
and send me scribbled notes
cut in lust and adoration
   and I didn't want
her to sidle over on the seat
and with a quick thrust
cut my throat
   and I didn't want
my neighbours in Morrow's Cove
to gossip about the girl
riding in my car
and the wind blew
red russet tangerine leaves
(perhaps the wind blew
the girl's shoes away)
but not even the January wind
can blow away
my seared memory
of a lone girl
walking in bare feet
into the winter
on an empty road
where I passed
and didn't stop

V: WHERE DO(ES) THE VOICE(S) COME FROM?

Stanley Fish draws attention to the role of interpretive or discourse communities in controlling reading and writing. He contends:

> Communication occurs within situations and . . . to be in a situation is already to be in possession of (or to be possessed by) a structure of assumptions, of practices understood to be relevant in relation to purposes and goals that are already in place; and it is within the assumption of these purposes and goals that any utterance is immediately heard. (318)

For Fish, then, readers and authors and texts are inextricably wedded to systems of intelligibility, to interpretive communities. One of the most significant systems of interpretive signs which operates in a discourse community is the generic code. A useful understanding of genre is offered by Rosalie Colie: "A genre-system offers a set of interpretations, of 'frames' or 'fixes' on the world" (8). Jonathan Culler concurs: "A genre . . . is a conventional function of language, a particular relation to the world which serves as norm or expectation to guide the reader in his encounter with the text" (Poetics 136). Culler also observes that "conventions of a genre . . . are essentially possibilities of meaning, ways of naturalizing the text" and that "to naturalize a text is to bring it into relation with a type of discourse or model which is already, in some sense, natural and legible" (137-138).

Culler's comments emphasize the role of generic conventions in guiding the reader of a text, but his observations also apply to the writer as she composes her text. The writer is not sequestered in a sterile chamber where she produces her texts isolate from the texts of other writers. She is guided, constrained, and influenced by the norms and expectations, the models and discourse types of other writers. As Maria Corti suggests, "genre serves as the place where the individual work enters into a complex network of relations with other texts" (115).

As a writer I am always influenced by generic conventions, but I do not have to regard those conventions as a road map that must be meticulously followed if I plan to reach my destination. Generic conventions are more like signs with arrows indicating that over there, beyond here, somewhere the traveller has a good chance of finding a place worth finding.

O

I was on a toboggan, standing up,
like a California surfer, like Frankie Avalon
flying straight out down Lynch's Lane
all the way from Old Man Downey's house
riding the blue-white snow, over the first
boy-built bump, rope tied tightly
around my mitt like a bronco buster's grip,
and Cec shouting words I thought were curses
because he'd never made it from the top
    and I was going to,
the hill and snow and toboggan and me
all one like a postcard from Austria,
over the last bump, bracing for the sharp bend
where Lynch's Lane twists into Bannister's Road
shooting through the air with a grin
frozen on my face, the letters E-S-S-O
growing bigger and bigger until I dived into the
                        O
a perfect bull's-eye, and woke up the next day
singing Old MacDonald had a farm
                    EIEIO
and Cec said he was glad I wasn't dead,
but I knew darn sure he was just glad
I was stopped by the truck
and not still surfing all the way
through the O and around the world.

W: WHERE DO(ES) THE VOICE(S) COME FROM?

Lev Vygotsky argues for the social construction of human consciousness and understanding. In Mind and Society he concludes that "the internalization of socially rooted and historically developed activities is the distinguishing feature of human psychology" (57).

John Trimbur supports the claim that language is a social practice:

> Words in inner speech are "saturated with sense" because they evoke, as it were, a chorus of voices from outside, contending for our attention and allegiance. In inner speech everyone talks at once, and the voices of the significant others in our life history make each word we think a microcosm of our social experience. We may feel locked in the confines of inner speech, but we are not really alone or isolated from others. The compression and condensation of language that occur when we internalize the voices of others disembody these voices, leaving ghostlike accents in the words that compose inner speech. But the point is that the words we think of and experience as private thought

> are in fact constituted through the voices of others that echo in our verbal thought. (217)

Trimbur suggests that language is "an ideological field, a social horizon, a struggle of voices" (219).

Writing is a carnival, an enchanting bombardment of all the senses, a challenge to make sense out of the apparent nonsense sensuously flooding the air, the ever present threat of drowning mollified by the promise of buoyant pleasure.

SAILING IN A CONCRETE BOAT

In the long winter
my father built a concrete boat
shaped in chicken wire and cement
(asked why he didn't just build
a wooden boat, he mumbled,
Old Joe Hall, at least
seventy-five years close
to the grave, is building
a wooden boat, anybody can build
a wooden boat), built his concrete boat
and sailed into the August morning
sun like a dollop of margarine
laughing farewells to mother and promises
of gifts from Greece and Mauritius
and sailed across the Humber Arm
into the sun and was gone
and I knew he'd never come back
and the next day the kitchen door
opened and my father was back,
his face twisted in a shy grin,
The concrete boat sailed like a dead cod;
a big wave spit me up on shore
outside the harbour near Dunphy's plant;
I should've built with wood.

NINETY-FIVE QUESTIONS FOR GENERATING DISPUTATION ON THE POWER AND EFFICACY OF THE PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES OF WRITING TEACHERS

Out of love and zeal for truth and (w)right(e) practice and the desire to bring them to light and fruition, the following questions ought to be asked by writing teachers with vigour and rigour:

1. Am I a writer? Why or why not?
2. What criteria guide my choice of subjects for writing assignments?
3. What criteria guide my evaluation procedures?
4. Do I valorize some experiences as more appropriate for writing than others? Do I encourage my students in repression and censorship by suggesting that some of their experiences are inappropriate for writing in the discourse community of school?
5. How do I react to a student's expression of views when I do not agree with the views?
6. Do I encourage my students to write only with strict adherence to the conventions of standardized English? Do I encourage innovative style and structure?
7. Is everybody a writer? Can everybody be a writer? Should everybody be a writer?
8. Do I imply that most of my students are incapable of writing anything really worth reading?

9. Do I imply that the ideas of most of my students are infantile and misdirected?

10. Do I encourage my students to challenge conventional ways of regarding the world, to challenge "common sense" and "what is natural" and what is "true"?

11. Do I invite my students to adopt different positions from which to reflect on experience?

12. Do I make room in school for the languages of home and marketplace and workplace and playground?

13. Do I operate with the conviction that to write is to engage with questions concerning social, historical, political, and economic forces, how lives are shaped, how people are interpellated as subjects in society?

14. Do I acknowledge how voices in writing are ideologically constructed and constrained?

15. Am I encouraging my students to take risks in their writing? risks with themselves? with their audiences? with their texts?

16. Do I provide frequent opportunities for journals, reading diaries, learning logs?

17. Do I provide frequent opportunities for freewriting, rough drafts, exploratory writing, prewriting and rewriting?

18. Am I encouraging my students to write collaboratively?

19. Am I seeking a miraculous cure, the guaranteed solution, the irrefutable formula for success in my writing classes, or am I experimenting with multiple models and conceptions and theories open to ongoing interrogation and criticism and revision?

20. Am I providing frequent opportunities for my students to write across the curriculum and to learn the codes and conventions of different discourse communities? Why do I want my students to learn the codes and conventions of different discourse communities?

21. What criteria do I use for determining what makes writing good? bad? mediocre?

22. How ready am I to encourage my students to interact with conventions, to contravene conventions?

23. Do my students perceive their writing as acting constructively on the world, capable of changing the world?

24. Am I zealously committed to teaching my students about topic sentences and concluding sentences, about the essential functions of unity, coherence, and emphasis, about the necessity to write complete thoughts in complete sentences, about the obligation to avoid dangling constructions, faulty coordination, double negatives, upside-down subordination, awkward

inversion, interrupted movement, indefinite references, run-on sentences, about the need to be neurotic about comma usage?

25. Do I operate with the fundamental notion that language is an instrument for transmitting meanings, that language must be transparent and not call attention to itself?

26. Do I operate with the fundamental notion that language must be standardized, homogenized, cauterized, that my/your language must be similar to (a copy of) his language?

27. Do I encourage my students to doubt and to interrogate? How can I invite my students to enter the labyrinth of writing, to embrace skepticism and insecurity and uncertainty?

28. Do I encourage my students to write texts that are full of desire for readers?

29. Do I encourage and nurture my students as authors with author-ity?

30. Am I riding a hobby horse and pretending to gallop toward the enchanted land of competencies and mastery learning where atomistic blocks of knowledge and skills build a tower stretching into the clouds with the promise of heaven in reach?

31. Can I conceptualize writing as a collage, as

barnacles growing on a shipwreck, as salvage, as a scavenger hunt?

32. Do my procedures for evaluating writing acknowledge that writing is tentative, uncontrollable, unfinished, endlessly disseminating, that writing is always writing-in-process?

33. In my classroom am I actively creating an environment of interest, concern, support, direction, and freedom, an environment which motivates and nurtures the hard work of writing? Have I helped develop a supportive community of writers in my classroom?

34. Do I perceive my students as subjects in process who require opportunities and freedom and encouragement to constitute themselves in language use?

35. Do I encourage my students to perceive themselves and others as subject positions inscribed/constituted in language?

36. Do I encourage my students to read widely in order to encounter an extensive range of writing models?

37. Do I read widely?

38. Do I perceive writing as unlocking textual power?

39. Do I perceive writing as fun, as play?

40. Am I reflecting on the implications of sexuality and textuality for pedagogy?

41. Can a classroom operate successfully if students are encouraged to develop their voices, thereby courting heterogeneity and unpredictability and disorder and cacophony? Can a classroom operate sucessfully if students are not encouraged to develop their voices, thereby courting heterogeneity and unpredictability and disorder and cacophony?

42. If language is always undecidable, if textuality is a wide-ranging network of slipping and skidding signifiers, if meaning is like trying to embrace a shadow (there and not-there), is writing then a fearsome experience like exploring a deep cave by lighting matches?

43. As a writer am I a borrower? a plagiarist? a collector? a player on a team?

44. Do I encourage peer editing or do I prefer to be the sole editor and commentator and evaluator in the class?

45. Do I prefer to evaluate with a style sheet and a red pencil? When I circle grammatical "infelicities," do I enjoy a little shiver of superior satisfaction?

46. Am I more comfortable/secure with a list of clearly defined behavioural objectives or with the unpredictable experience of education in process?

47. How does the architecture and design of my classroom affect the writing experiences of my

students?

48. Do I provide my students, as well as myself, with opportunities to revel in words, to construct our worlds in language, to experience the joy and pleasure and power of language?

49. Do I regard unity and coherence and clarity as indicative of accomplished writing, as inherent qualities of good writing, or as rhetorical effects accomplished by operating within certain conventions?

50. Is a writer an amanuensis, a translator, an annotator of pre-existing texts?

51. How would I respond to a student who wrote a story or essay in one long, convoluted, meandering sentence, who ended a story with "etc.," who used polysyllabic words combed from a dictionary, who insisted on writing in questions instead of statements, who ignored the conventions of punctuation and capitalization, who inserted blank spaces into the text, who wrote a story in one hundred numbered sentences, who wrote obfuscated prose that demanded an energetic recuperative effort by readers, who ignored connections between portions of a text, who wrote a poem in which the "I" claims not to be the "I" writing the poem or responsible for the poem, an essay that refuses to prove a point or defend a thesis or substantiate a truth, writing that

constantly decenters the reader, a story that instructs the reader to read by folding one page over another or to read from right to left?

52. Do I encourage my students to regard themselves as writers?

53. Can I conceptualize writing as akin to Newfoundland yard art which involves collecting driftwood and parts of old cars and moose antlers and transforming them into a colourful, if unlikely, assortment of eye-catching shapes and arrangements?

54. Am I patient with my students as they grow in their powers of textualization?

55. Am I prepared for the emotional and psychological upheavals and crises that inevitably accompany the experience of transformation involved in writing?

56. Do I expect my students to know what I want in their writing? Do I know what I want?

57. Do I direct my students to find the right words to write what they know or do I direct my students to write the words that will award them the right to know what they can know?

58. How important or necessary am I in the writing classroom?

59. In responding to students' writing am I harsh in criticism or generous in praise? In responding to

students' writing are my students harsh in criticism or generous in praise? In responding to my writing are my students harsh in criticism or generous in praise?

60. Am I constantly questioning my practice as a writing teacher?

61. Do I feel exposed in my writing, not unlike standing naked in a shopping mall on Saturday afternoon? Do my students feel naked, too? Why or why not?

62. As a teacher am I an authoritarian monarch or a servant?

63. Do I perceive writing as integrally related to living (not unlike breathing) or as an exclusive privilege of a gifted few?

64. How can I encourage students to embark on writing as an adventure?

65. What metaphors do I use to conceptualize writing? How do the following metaphors conceptualize writing: writing as pumping water from a well, writing as a window through which the objective world can be seen, writing as a jig-saw puzzle, writing as distillation and condensation, writing as constructing a skyscraper, writing as impersonation, writing as a boxing match, writing as pinning clothes on a line, writing as making raspberry preserves, writing as a conjuring trick,

writing as a honed knife, writing as the inducing of hallucinating effects, writing as putting an IKEA bed together, writing as a scrapbook, writing as an adventure in a deep, dark forest, writing as a river, writing as wrapping paper and ribbon for packaging, writing as radio signals between a sender and a receiver, writing as umbilical cords between persons, writing as Atlantic salmon struggling up Robinson's River to the spawning pool, writing as the orange buoys Newfoundland fishermen use to support their cod nets, writing as a dance on a hot summer beach?

66. Do I expect each of my students to write in a single voice, a voice that is stamped with identifiable qualities of her unique personality?

67. Do I expect to like or concur with the writing of all my students all the time?

68. Am I threatened when my students write with such inventiveness and humour and insight that they outshine me?

69. As a writing teacher am I an ear, eavesdropper, echo, ectype, edge, edifice, edict, editor, educator, effector, effervescence, effigy, efflorescence, effluence, effulgence, effusion, egg, egghead, ego, ejaculation, ejector, elaborator, elastic, elder, element, elevator, emancipator, emasculator, emblem,

embodiment, embryo, emcee, emendator, eminence, emissary, emission, emulator, enabler, enchantress, encourager, energizer, enervator, enforcer, engineer, engraver, enigma, entertainer, enthusiast, entry, enucleator, enunciator, envoy, epicure, equivocator, eraser, eruption, escalator, escort, estimator, evangelist, evacuator, evaluator, evocator, ewer, examiner, example, excavator, excellency, exciter, exclusionist, executioner, executor, exegete, exemplar, exhibitionist, exorcist, expediter, expert, explorer, exponent, expositer, expostulator, expropriator, extenuator, extinguisher, extoller, eye?

70. Do I seek an authentic voice full of honesty and sincerity in my students' writing? Can I identify an authentic voice full of honesty and sincerity? How? What advice do I give my students about voice and writing?

71. Do I foster diverse writing experiences?

72. Do I understand style as innately appropriate to writing or as related to fashion and social convention?

73. Do I deify writers (even a little) as an inspired and superior and rare breed of people?

74. Am I convinced that there are One Hundred Great Books of Western Culture which stand as a towering touchstone against which all writing ought to be evaluated?

75. Are the canonical works of English literature mostly written by men because women don't write or because writing by women has been ignored by patriarchal institutions of publishing and distribution and reviewing and scholarship?

76. Do I expect women to write in predictable ways?

77. Does keeping a journal or diary seem more like a woman's activity than a man's?

78. Do women write about personal experiences while men write about experiences of politics and history and economics and philosophy?

79. Do I encourage my students to be original, to write what they think has never been written, or do I invite them to shake the kaleidoscope of textuality and rearrange the bits and pieces in a configuration that might be new but might be a copy, that might be a new variation on an old arrangement but is probably an old arrangement with all the freshness of newness?

80. Do I expect all my students to follow/obey the same writing process for all writing projects?

81. Have I used any of the following projects and places for publishing writing, mine and my students: t-shirts, posters, greeting cards, door-to-door distribution, placemats, shopping bags, sky-writing, air balloons, murals, dial-a-poem, cable television,

audio-visual productions, tattoos, food colouring in snow, bus advertising, helium balloons, poem-athon, mail blitz to famous people, chocolate wrappers, community parade, poet pen pals, exchange with seniors, community bulletin boards, graffiti, cashier counters, bumper stickers, bonus gifts? Why or why not?

82. Do I regard creative writing as a luxury, a dilettante's pastime far removed from the real world of objective, get-things-done prose?

83. Why do I want my students to write?

84. Can I conceptualize writing as a patch-work quilt made up of scraps redolent with memories and stories and traces of the past? as braiding or weaving, as a mosaic, as a hybrid?

85. Do I indicate to my students that writing is an expression of subjectivity or a construction of subjectivity? a site where autonomous subjectivity is put on display or a site where different subject positions are enacted?

86. Am I willing to alter my conception of what makes writing good in order to recognize the merit of writing that does not fit my conception?

87. Do I award higher value to stories that are "true" than to stories that are "fictional"?

88. How do I react to criticism of my writing? How do my students react to criticism of their writing?

89. How do I react to writing characterized by hate, prejudice, pornography, violence, and vulgarity? Do I prefer that students not write about these experiences? Why or why not?

90. How do I react to writing about abuse, incest, suicidal reflections, sexual concerns, and emotional turmoil? Do I prefer that students not write about these experiences? Why or why not?

91. Am I confident that I know what I am doing as a writing teacher?

92. Do I regard schoolwriting as a practice run for realwriting in the realworld, or as a significant part of writingtherealworld?

93. Do I encourage my students to examine language use as rhetorical contrivance, to take the mechanism of language use apart and investigate its components and connections, to understand how language manipulates and controls?

94. Am I sensitively responsive to my students' tentative efforts or do I demand "finished products"?

95. When was the last time I asked these questions?

X: WHERE DO(ES) THE VOICE(S) COME FROM?

Jacques Derrida contends that "there is no linguistic sign before writing" (Grammatology 14). According to Derrida, "there is nothing before the text; there is no pretext that is not already a text" (Dissemination 89). He interrogates the metaphysics of presence which posits an origin or a voice or subjectivity or consciousness or a transcendental signified or truth or logos or reason or Cartesian cogito:

> Germination, dissemination. There is no first insemination. The semen is already swarming. The "primal" insemination is dissemination. A trace, a graft whose traces have been lost. (Dissemination 304)

Informed by this perspective Derrida regards all his texts as grafts, as insertions into the textual flow. He describes his books as "unique and differentiated textual operations" in an "unfinished movement" with "no absolute beginning" (Positions 3).

Derrida reminds me that writing is more than the transcription of an inner voice or the expression of a core self in a unique voice. Derrida encourages me to reflect on writing as languishing in language, a dance of oppositions, a labyrinthine journey, a game of

Scrabble, a chorus of conflictual voices, an ontological enterprise, a (w)hole and seam(less) web of textuality, (con)fusion, dis-ease, textual intercourse, dispersing dissemination/not determinate destination, a germinating and gestating blank page, glossalalia, textual acrobatics, polyphony, ventriloquism, (a) play.

WOR(L)D

in the beginning is
          the word
              without beginning

the spoken word written
          the written word spoken

the word born in the world
          the world born in the word

the word is worldly
          the world is wordy

the word is in the world
          the world is in the word

the word is the world
          the world is the word

in the end is
          the word
              without end

Z: WHERE DO(ES) THE VOICE(S) COME FROM?

TANGLED
(Lines from Edmonton to my father in Newfoundland)

far away
in a city you will never know
I chase words in the cold air
  and measure my worth
  by the words made mine
  and remember you
      silent
crouched in the bow of a dory
rising and falling on blue-gray waves
in the air yellow-orange with the sun
untangling the line I twisted in knots
in my frenzy to tear from the ocean
a cod with a lead jigger in its side
  and I remember you
      sat
and traced the line through its knots
and said nothing
and untangled my line ——
that could reach to the bottom of the ocean
and lay in swirls at your feet
untangled it
  in the morning sun
    through the noon sun
      into the afternoon sun
and said nothing
and I wouldn't look at you
because I knew you were mad
and I had to look
and you weren't mad
  you were smiling
and where I live now
there is no ocean
unless you stand on your head
and pretend the sky is ocean
  but it's not
and the line I throw out
never hooks into the sky
but always falls back
and tangles at my feet
and perhaps that's why
you could spend hours untangling
my tangled line
   you knew
an untangled line could be thrown
into the ocean's black silence
   and
anchor you to the bottom

In my poetry I am reminded again and again that for all my efforts at honesty and sincerity, the poetry represents a performance. In the writing process I am aware of fabricating, constructing, and manipulating words in order to achieve effects. God-like I am immanent in the process (actively working with the raw materials) and transcendent (looking over my shoulder, often with an amused grin or a whimsical nod of approval). I do not write about people and events and emotions the way they are (or were). I write about people and events and emotions the way they might have been (or could be).

During the past year I have written a series of poems that explore my boyhood experiences growing up in Corner Brook, Newfoundland. The poems are little stories, straightforward, not obscure. They deal with ordinary events. They often involve my father. (I am surprised how often the poems examine my relationship with my father since I am not aware of thinking about him much outside the writing of the poems.)

One such poem is "Tangled." I've been told by a number of people that "Tangled" is a moving poem. I often feel emotional when I read it. But how authentic or honest or sincere is the voice of the poem?

The poem cannot emanate from the center of an unchanging, inviolable, autonomous self, an individual stable presence, because I am certain only that I have no such stable essence. I am a split subject full of chaos and contradiction and conflict. (Leggo is legion.) "Tangled" is a gesture, an action, a sign. It is a performance in an ongoing pageant in which I seek to make sense out of nonsense and nonsense out of sense, order out of chaos and chaos out of order, solution out of dissolution, dissolution out of solution, illusion out of disillusion, and disillusion out of illusion. "Tangled" is one more swathe of bandage that cloaks my invisibility with at least the semblance of visibility. The poem is one more subject position from which I can disclose the world.

And in that last paragraph I am revelling in the metaphoricity and music of language. Am I less serious because I am playful? less playful because I am serious? Is the voice in these last two paragraphs authentic and honest and sincere?

IN/CONCLUSION

Together we have engaged in a boisterous group discussion with many voices. In "Invitation" I present myself as the host of a party. The party has been going on for a long time and will continue for a long time. "In/conclusion" signifies no more than the temporary absence of my interjected voice (perhaps as one would be absent at a party while visiting the washroom), an absence imposed for the sake of convenience--in this case the need to impose a boundary on a project that will not cease because limitless and inexhaustible. During my absence you are invited to answer the following multiple choice quiz:

Circle the correct answer:

VOICE IS

1. Persona
2. Naturalness
3. Driving force
4. Stance
5. Point of view
6. Code
7. Style
8. Rhetorical device
9. Rhythm
10. Authority
11. Truth
12. Figure
13. Self
14. Mask
15. Unity
16. Essence
17. Tone
18. Mood
19. Sincerity

20. Personal imprint
21. Creativity
22. Ideological construction
23. Warmth
24. Energy
25. Liberation
26. Ventriloquism
27. All of the above
28. None of the above
29. Some of the above
30. I don't know

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VITA

NAME: Carleton Derek Leggo

PLACE OF BIRTH: Corner Brook, Newfoundland

YEAR OF BIRTH: 1953

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION:

M.Ed. in English Education, University of New Brunswick, 1987.

M.A. in English and Creative Writing, University of New Brunswick, 1986.

Certificate in Biblical Studies, Ontario Theological Seminary, 1979.

B.Ed., Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1976.

B.A., Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1974.

HONOURS AND AWARDS:

Newfoundland Government Fellowship, 1974-1975.

University of New Brunswick Fellowship, 1986-1987.

Sir Charles G.D. Roberts Memorial Prize, University of New Brunswick, 1986.

First place in poetry category, New Talent Competition, University of New Brunswick, 1986.

University of Alberta Assistantship, 1987-1989.

Province of Alberta Graduate Fellowship, 1988-1989.

James Patrick Folinsbee Prize in English, University of Alberta, 1988.

First place in long poem category, The Gateway Literary Contest, 1988.

Second place in short story category, The Gateway Literary Contest, 1988.

First place in long poem category, The Gateway Literary Contest, 1989.

First place in short poem category, The Gateway Literary Contest, 1989.

The Andrew Stewart Graduate Prize, University of Alberta, 1989.

Izaak Walton Killam Memorial Scholarship, University of Alberta, 1989.

RELATED WORK EXPERIENCE:

1979-1985. Teacher, L.S. Eddy Collegiate, Stephenville, Newfoundland.

1976-1978. Teacher, R.W. Parsons Collegiate, Robert's Arm, Newfoundland.

1986-1987. Research assistant, Division of Student Teaching, University of New Brunswick.

1987. Teaching assistant, EDCI 352, "Teaching in the Secondary School," University of Alberta.

1988. Instructor, EDCI 352, "Teaching in the Secondary School," University of Alberta.

1988. Instructor, "Everybody Needs to Be a Writer," Teachers-Administrators Institute, Prairie Graduate School, Three Hills, Alberta.

1989. Instructor, EDCI 453, "Teaching Composition in the Secondary School," University of Alberta.

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